

UK journalist threatened with arrest under Terrorism Act for filming protest

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A reporter for local daily Sheffield newspaper, the *Sheffield Star*, was threatened with arrest under the Terrorism Act on June 23, as he attempted to film a protest against cuts to concessionary travel passes for pensioners and disabled people.

The protest ended with the violent arrest of two pensioners.

Alex Evans from the *Sheffield Star* was at the city's train station filming the protest on his mobile phone when he was ordered by a member of Northern Rail's Rail Response Unit to delete his footage. The response unit cited the Terrorism Act as their legal authority.

When Evans tried to film for a second time, the rail official repeated the threat, again citing the Terrorism Act, and took the reporter's personal details. The official said the journalist was engaged in an "arrestable offence" and that he could face a fine and a criminal record.

George Arthur, aged 64, and Tony Nuttall, aged 65, were arrested after transport police and Northern Rail security staff confronted around 45 protesters following the latest in a series of "Freedom Rides"—named after US civil rights actions—in opposition to changes to the system of free rail travel in South Yorkshire. The previous rail concessionary scheme was cut as part of austerity measures to reduce a £243,000 shortfall in the budget of South Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority.

A number of commuters managed to film as Arthur and Nuttall were handcuffed, arrested and bundled away. The two men have since been charged with failure to pay, and obstructing police and are to appear at Sheffield Magistrates' Court. The *Independent* newspaper commented, "Disabled and elderly campaigners have vowed to continue their protests against the removal of travel concessions after claiming

they were victims of 'thuggish' behaviour by police and security staff during Monday's demonstration against the cuts.

"Protesters—including a blind woman who was taken to hospital after being injured when she fell over a wheelchair—said they suffered cuts and bruises as a result of being 'manhandled' in clashes with British Transport Police and members of Northern Rail's rail response team.

"Another man collapsed and was taken to hospital while a 70-year-old protester was nearly knocked onto the tracks during the melee."

Jen Dunstan of Sheffield Disabled People Against the Cuts said, "Dozens of elderly and disabled people have been left with bruising. Some have cuts where their skin has broken from being pushed and shoved.

"A placid and calm gentleman was roughly manhandled. I am angry and shocked. The police are meant to protect elderly people."

Yorkshire Ambulance Service was called after one protester passed out with breathing difficulties on the platform.

Evans later said, "I felt intimidated when threatened under terrorism laws. I know that ordinarily I would need permission, but this was an extraordinary situation and in my view, one which was my duty and in the public interest to report on."

The *Sheffield Star*'s editor, James Mitchinson, described what happened to the reporter as "absolutely unacceptable."

"We have a right to report the news, and the *Star* will always fight for that right. Our readers expect nothing less. But this case illustrates just how difficult it can be to report the news, on the spot when, increasingly, authorities are seeking to 'manage' it.

"We're well aware that Sheffield Station is, like all

stations, technically private property, and ordinarily we'd need to seek permission to film there.

“But this wasn't a PR stunt, it was an extraordinary event that couldn't have been predicted and it was very much in the public interest that people were made aware of what was going on. As the local paper and website that's our job, and it's a job that people expect us to do.”

On Tuesday, Northern Rail issued an apology to the *Sheffield Star* reporter. A company spokeswoman confirmed that the official who approached Evans was a member of one of its rail response teams.

“We know the officer in question was incorrect to delete the phone footage,” she said, “and we are re-briefing our Rail Response Team to ensure this does not happen again.”

Previously, the company had said, “Members of the media must have written permission from the train operator which manages the station before undertaking any filming on station property. Under no circumstances are Northern Rail employees to be filmed without prior agreement.”

On Tuesday night, Martyn Guiver, Northern Rail's head of crime management, called Evans to apologise and said he would speak to the person responsible—a security officer contracted to Northern Rail.

The incident illustrates a growing trend in which the police and state have employed, or sought to employ the Terrorism Act and other reactionary legislation in a variety of instances that have nothing to do with terrorism.

- In January, British police sought to seize material from Channel 4 TV station relating to their broadcasting of revelations provided by former UK intelligence operative and whistleblower Peter Francis.

- During the same month, the Terrorism Act was used as a pretext by Greater Manchester Police to raid a protest camp at Barton Moss in Salford, north west England, which was peacefully opposing shale gas test drillings operations being carried out by the IGas corporation.

- In May, anti-terror legislation was used to pursue a whistleblower, who revealed details of the relationship between Britain's tax authorities, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), and top companies accused of tax avoidance.

- In September 2013, Baraa Shiban, a Yemeni

activist who was campaigning against the use of drones, was detained by British authorities and questioned under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

- Last September, Britain's High Court ruled that the government could continue to examine data seized from David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald (one of Edward Snowden's principal collaborators), when he was detained at Heathrow airport in August under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000. He was detained to determine if he had committed a criminal offence under that legislation, the Official Secrets Act 1911, or the Official Secrets Act 1989. In February this year the High Court supported government officials against Miranda and ruled that he “was acting in support of Mr. Greenwald's activities as a journalist”.

The disparate character of these measures is aimed in a single direction: the repression of organised political opposition to the capitalist system.



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