# London police carry out mass arrests during coronation of King Charles

**Robert Stevens**
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The Conservative government utilised Saturday's coronation of King Charles III to clamp down on anti-monarchist and other protesters. Newly enacted police state powers under the Public Order Act rolled out days before the event were used to carry out mass arrests and set a precedent for their future widespread use.

London's Metropolitan Police arrested 64 people for offences including affray, public order offences, breach of the peace and the sinister charge of conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.

Most significantly the Met moved to take out the leadership of the Republic group and prevent their participation in the protests. Republic are a registered pressure group in existence since 1983 advocating the abolition of the monarchy and its replacement with a parliamentary republic. Their protests generally consist of chanting "Not My King!"

In the days leading to the coronation the Home Office sent threatening messages to Republic, informing them that the Public Order Act 2023 had been passed and that its provisions would be used during a mass mobilisation of police. The legislation was brought forward from its initial timetable and received Royal Assent—signed into law by Charles himself, on May 2. The Met announced four days ahead of the coronation, "We have an extremely low threshold for anybody or anything that will disrupt this event and what you will see is very swift action from us".

At around 7.30am Saturday, before any protesting had begun, six members of Republic, including its leader Graham Smith were arrested near Trafalgar Square where the group planned to hold a rally near the statue of the deposed monarch Charles 1 (1600-1649). Police seized by force a vanload of hundreds of placards reading "Not My King." A video seen by 5.5 million on Twitter shows a reporter asking why the arrests are being carried out and a police officer replies, "I'm not going to get into a conversation about that, they are under arrest, end of."

Smith was held for nearly 16 hours in police custody, only being released at 11pm Saturday evening. Smith tweeted, "I'm now out of the police station. Still waiting for my colleagues. Make no mistake. There is no longer a right to peaceful protest in the UK. I have been told many times the monarch is there to defend our freedoms. Now our freedoms are under attack in his name." He added of the arrested colleagues, "We are not being given a reason. They will probably be released when the whole monarchy PR show is over."

A Republic director, Harry Stratton, stated, "What would we lock on to? We are just protesting"—referring to the newly-minted offense of gluing yourself to a road, building and art-works by environmental protesters. He added that one protester at Trafalgar Square had been taken away by police as he had string on him. "It's string that was part of his placard. What was he going to do with that?"

Stratton revealed, "We had meetings with the police where they outlined what would and wouldn't be accepted today. They told us any mention of Prince Andrew or the sex abuse cases would mean arrests."

Chillingly, the state was prepared to kill protesters during the coronation, with Stratton revealing, "They said if anybody got in the way of the procession, they could be shot because the military around the streets might be a bit touchy and not understand what was going on." He added, "These arrests seem like the work of a police state. It's not acceptable. We are only saying that we don't believe in the monarchy and we're doing it peacefully."

Such was the dragnet imposed by the Met that three volunteer members of Westminster City Council's

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Night Stars team who give out rape alarm whistles to vulnerable women—with Home Office funding—were arrested for having the item in their possession. The volunteers were apprehended at 2am Saturday morning on suspicion of conspiracy to commit public nuisance and held for 14 hours. The Met claimed it had "received intelligence that indicated groups and individuals seeking to disrupt today's coronation proceedings were planning to use rape alarms to disrupt the procession".

The Public Order Act is one of the most draconian pieces of legislation in British history, effectively ending the right to protest and further clamping down on strikes. Protests are deemed illegal if they include acts causing "serious disruption to two or more individuals, or to an organisation". "Serious disruption" includes "noise".

The Home Office stated last week that the legislation would "bolster the police's powers to respond more effectively to disruptive and dangerous protests." It noted "the following measures in the Public Order Bill will commence on 3rd May 2023. The definition of serious disruption in the Public Order Bill: locking on; going equipped to lock on; interference with key national infrastructure; amending the seniority of police officers in London who may attach conditions to an upcoming protest or prohibit a trespassory assembly to match that applicable in forces outside of London."

Police can stop and search protesters if they suspect they are setting out to cause disruption. The penalty for those convicted of blocking roads, airports and railways is a jail sentence of up to 12 months. Those locking on to others, objects or buildings face prison for six months and an unlimited fine.

One of the Republic organisers said, "We had a delivery of placards ready for the protest and then the tactical support unit questioned us as to how we had got through the road closures. They questioned whether what we were doing was a delivery. They then said they found evidence of means of locking on, of items that could be used to lock on, and they arrested us."

The repression was carried out as part of a vast lockdown of the capital by 11,500 Met Police officers, codenamed Operation Golden Orb. 9,000 members of the UK's Armed Forces were in London with 2,000 on active duty and the remainder on ceremonial duties.

Also deployed was HMS Diamond, with the Type-45 destroyer warship docked in the Thames at Greenwich. The Royal Navy said it had been deployed to "celebrate the Coronation". However, the *Sun* newspaper reported, "But Naval sources say it would only take a 'flick of a switch' to trigger its air defence systems." The ship is able to deploy 16 missiles at the same time as they head towards targets.

The repression of protest, no matter how small, points to the crisis and fear of a ruling elite and the terminal decay of a system atop which sits a hidebound medieval monarchy with its ridiculous ceremonies, crowns and costumes—the accumulation of centuries of medieval trash. They view all protest as a threat from below.

Several commentators raised that the coronation points to the existence of two Britains, torn apart by class antagonism. No less than the *Financial Times*, in an op-ed by Henry Mance, warned that for all the interest of a royalist constituency in the "splendid and strange ritual", it "would be wrong to say that the British public had been gripped by the prospect of the coronation. Two-fifths thought it was a waste of taxpayer money, according to one poll. Two-thirds didn't care about it very much or at all, according to another." He added, "The whole of Britain, let alone the Commonwealth, could not fit into the coronation. Britain is not simply the gleam of the orb; it is the gloom of the sky outside. It is not only the flag-waving faithful on the Mall; it is the republican protesters who were arrested in Trafalgar Square. It is not just the millions who gaped at the television; it is the millions who were more interested in the afternoon's football."

The coronation exposed that the "oldest democracy in the world" is one only in name. That protest against this system is now outlawed is a decisive refutation of all the lies that NATO's war against Russia is being fought to defend democracy.

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