

# Guide To Public Order Situations

**What we present here is a brief guide to surviving public order situations and slowing down or preventing the police from gaining the upper hand once a situation has occurred.**

**Bear in mind that the police are probably much better equipped and trained for close combat than you or I. They have been psyching themselves up for hours, are likely to have plenty of reserves standing by and usually feel confident with the law behind them. Beating the police is about outwitting them, not necessarily hitting them over the head.**

## THE AIMS AND METHODS OF THE STATE

**British Law has traditionally been concerned with keeping the peace and not necessarily preventing or solving crime.** The roots of such public order policing can be traced back to the common law offences introduced to control the havoc caused by mercenaries returning from the Hundred Years War. These laws evolved into the 1967 Riot Act, which established in law the concept of arresting anyone present at a riot, regardless of whether they are guilty of violent acts. The Riot Act no longer exists, replaced by the Public Order Act in 1986. The reality of the situation is that the police act as if it did.

The Public Order Manual of Tactical Operations and Related Matters provides the police with clear instructions for dealing with situations where public order is threatened. This manual has never been made public, has no legal standing and was never discussed by Parliament. It basically gives the police guidance in the use of pre-emptive acts of violence, to achieve the following:

1. To break the crowd up into manageable portions, keep them moving then eventually disperse them.
2. To provoke violence as a way of justifying their actions and flushing out any ringleaders.
3. To contain the crowd and stop the trouble spreading.
4. To intimidate and break the spirit of the crowd.
5. To gather evidence for later.

The manual contains details of tactics which include the use of snatch squads, baton charges and the use of horses to disperse and intimidate large crowds. Make no mistake - the cops will be prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that our actions and protests are ineffective.

## So how do we make sure our actions are effective?

- Don't be tempted to stand around and fight – get to where you can cause disruption without the police around.
- Keep moving, as a group and individually. Fill gaps. Never stand still – chaos puts the police off.
- Nip police attempts to form lines or divide the crowd in the bud.
- Don't be intimidated.
- Do everything in small teams, prepare in advance.
- Think defensively. Protect each other and escape routes.
- Always face outwards, ie. away from us and towards them.
- Link arms as often as possible, form barriers, use your body.
- Move quickly and calmly, never giving the police time to react.

## PREPARATIONS

Staying out of jail and hospital need not be hard work. Most people caught up in riots manage it. But with a bit of forethought you can turn surviving a public order situation into a living order situation!

## THE AIMS OF THE PROTESTERS

No one really 'wins' at the end of the day, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that you are unhurt, still free and some egg is still stuck to the face of your original target after the police have been and gone.

With all that in mind, we suggest you stick to these three basic aims when you find yourself in a riot:

1. Get you and your mates away safely, rather than fighting.
2. Find a place to cause embarrassment and economic damage to your real target, rather than fighting.
3. Help others in trouble by administering first aid and de-arresting, rather than fighting.

## STICKING TOGETHER

**Always try to form an affinity group before setting out and at least have a buddy system whereby everybody has one person to look out for, and to act with, when a situation arises.**

Affinity groups are just a handful of people who work together as a unit, as and when circumstances arise. They

can meet beforehand to discuss ideas and possible reactions, practice or role play scenarios. The more your group meets, the quicker your reaction times will get and your effectiveness will improve. Affinity groups can often act without the need for internal discussion, they naturally develop their own shorthand communications and can divide up skills and equipment amongst each other. Water, D-locks, paint, first aid, food, banners and spare clothes is a lot for one person to carry, but divided up between five people it's nothing.

Do pay attention to what you're going to wear in advance. Consider precautions that are discrete, adaptable, easy to apply and discard. Thinking about these threats in advance will help:

### **1) Surveillance.**

Masking makes it difficult to identify individuals in a crowd and if everyone masks up no one will stand out. The cut off sleeve of a long sleeved t-shirt makes a good mask. Wear it casually around your neck. If you wear glasses use a cut off section of a stocking (hold-ups work best as they have thick elastic) instead of a t-shirt, this prevents glasses steaming up. You can use it as a hair-tie, if you're a hippy type, until you need it.

A hooded top will cover most of your face and a baseball cap on its own provides good protection from most static cameras, which are usually mounted high up. Sunglasses give good protection against harmful rays including UV and CCTV. Worth bearing in mind is that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 made an Amendment to Section 60 of The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. It gives any uniformed police officer the power to insist on the removal of any item of clothing a person is wearing or may wear for the purpose of concealment of identity. The item can be seized and retained.

### **2) Truncheon blows.**

A placard makes a good temporary shield and light strips of plastic under your clothing on the forearm could offer some protection. Unless you are intending to try and break police lines, the best protective clothing is probably a good pair of running shoes. More recently, the WOMBLES - inspired by Italy's Ya Basta group - have taken a more positive stance to protection by wearing thick layers of padding under their clothes, together with helmets. This enables them to keep police lines at bay, protecting themselves and the crowd behind them from truncheon blows. They are able to push through police lines and free demonstrators trapped by the use of a Section 60 (see later).

### **3) CS Spray.**

The best authorities suggest a solution of camden tablets (used to clean home brewing equipment), some say use lots of water, but its effectiveness is unclear. *Whatever you do don't rub it in* or take a hot shower. If in doubt get clear and let the wind blow it away from your skin. This will take 20 minutes.

### **4) Baton charges.**

If you want to take a banner, use long strips of plastic haulage tarps rather than a sheet. This can be used as a moveable barrier to stop charging police or for you to advance behind. Wrap the ends in on themselves so the police can't easily grab it. Hide behind and hold on tight.

## **DEFENDING**

### **If you aren't doing anything else you should always be defending.**

Whether that means securing a building, strengthening your position on the street, barricading (see later) or protecting others. Here are some ideas:

1. Keep looking outwards. For example, if someone is being given first aid, stand and face away from them.
2. Form cordons as much as possible. Anything the police want, including buildings and especially sound systems needs a strong outwardly facing cordon. Things may be quiet and you feel like a prick linking arms or holding hands with complete strangers, but do it. Repeat the mantra 'It's not a hippy peacenik thang, it's a rock hard revolutionary thang.' Take a leaf out of the police manual: stand like you're about to do 'the conga' and stick your right hand down the back of the trousers of the person in front, repeat along the line, asking permission first. It's virtually unbreakable.
3. Get into the habit of dancing with your back towards the sound system.
4. Someone needs to watch the police from a good vantage point, so that their next move can be pre-empted. On top of the sounds van is not a good place; no one can hear when you shout "Here come the dog handlers! Fucking run!" and any gestures you do will be interpreted as dancing...
5. Sitting down is good for dissuading the police from charging, but you should only do it in large numbers and the crowd needs to feel confident. We advise you to sit down as soon as the shout goes up, hesitating is not good, you can assess the situation once you're down there. Hopefully others will do the same. If it still looks viable five seconds later, link arms with your neighbours. There are times when sitting down is not really recommended – horses are maybe too unpredictable but the authors have never seen horses charge into a seated crowd, the way they do into a standing crowd. It's a good way to avoid the crowd getting split up. Some particularly violent gangs of police just aren't worth it either. Only experience will teach you when to sit down.
6. Barricades can be more hassle than they are worth. A solid impassable barricade can reduce your own options when you need to run. Bear in mind that anything you build now you are likely to get dragged over later - leave out the barbed wire. The best barricades are random matter strewn all over the place –

horses can't easily charge over them, police find it hard to hold a line in among them, but individuals can easily pick their way through. If you know police are advancing from only one direction and you have clear escape routes behind, barricades can be sensible. The tactics the cops developed during the 1980's riots was to drive the van into crowds with TSG [Tactical Support Group] in the back, jump out and arrest everyone they caught. Barricades are an effective way of stopping this.

7. The best form of defence of all is CHAOS! A complicated hierarchy needs orders to act on and those orders come from individuals making informed decisions. If the situation changes constantly they simply cannot keep up. Keep moving all the time, weave in and out of the crowd. Change your appearance. Open up new directions and possibilities, be unpredictable. If you find yourself stood still and passive for more than a minute then you've stopped acting defensively.
8. See also the stuff on the previous page about WOMBLING.

## BASIC POLICE CHOREOGRAPHY

**With any crowd the police will be looking to break it up as soon as possible.** Crowd dispersal is achieved with baton charges, horse charges and sometimes CS gas and vehicles. Some particularly nasty or out of control units may pile straight into the crowd, but there is usually a gap between the time they arrive and the start of the dispersal. This stalling time is often just dithering by the commanding officer, or psyching-tooling up time for the troops (the latter is easy to spot). This aside, there are three more reasons why they aren't wading straight in, see if you can spot them next time you're waiting for 'kick-off':

1. They haven't worked out where they're going to disperse you to.
2. They want to gather more evidence/flush out more ring leaders. This involves keeping you right where they can see you and provoking you like hell. They will film you and photograph you and send out snatch squads to pick off individuals.
3. They are waiting for back up because you out number them or are in danger of gaining the upper hand.

**However, since Euston Station, November 30th 1999, the police have been using the tactic of coralling people and preventing them from leaving.** Section 60 of the Criminal Justice Act 1994 gives police blanket powers to stop and search anyone in a certain area where they 'reasonably suspect' there will be incidents of serious violence. Often this tactic is used to gather information, but you're not obliged to help. They **can't** read anything of yours (address book, bank cards etc) and you **don't** have to give a name or address, but they can search you for weapons only. Being held for hours is dispiriting, you can't do much, and the police may push you about and provoke an opportunity to crack a few skulls. This is where the WOMBLES come into their own, you can take a more positive approach and not just wait around until the cops allow to let you leave. The old bill may also detain people to prevent a breach of the peace where they fear one is imminent. The legality of this is questionable, there will most likely be legal challenges in the near future.

## THE DANCE STEPS

OK, so they've stopped fucking around and now it's time to send you home, with a great story to tell your friends (let's face it, they won't see the truth on the news). The bulk of the action is shocking in its predictability. The following will be repeated over and over, in different combinations, until they win or get bored:

1. Officers in lines will pen you in (preferably on the pavement).
2. Officers in lines will push into a crowd to divide it in half.
3. Batons/horses/CS spray attack penned in crowds to lower morale.
4. Charges that slowly push you down a street (rush of cops > fall back > strengthen line > repeat).
5. Crowds throwing missiles will be 'put to flight', as it's harder to throw stuff if you are running.
6. Shift changes. (Often look for the arrival of reinforcements. It is important to try and spot the difference for reasons of morale, and that they are vulnerable during shift changes).

Most of the above require the individual officers to be in tight lines, so it's important to stop those lines forming. Unfortunately we are quite bad at this. The first line drawn is the most crucial and most people don't see it coming. The police will try and form lines right in amongst you if they can, thus weakening your position at the same time as strengthening theirs.

## LINE DANCING or STOPPING LINES FORMING

If the crowd seems volatile, the police will hold right back and the first line drawn will be some distance away. But if you are all hanging around looking confused and passive they will sneak right in amongst you and the first lines will be dividing lines. This is how it works:

The first divide the crowd up into 'actors' and 'viewers'. Small groups of officers will move into the crowd and start politely encouraging the timid ones onto the pavement. Once the crowd starts moving the way they want, those little groups of cops will get bigger and start joining up. Before you know it, there's two crowds on two pavements with two lines of cops penning them in. Let the head cracking commence. Or...

- Don't stand and watch them.
- Don't look like you'll let them get anywhere near you.
- Spot gaps in the crowd and fill them.

- Work out which space they want to take and get there with your mates first.
- Get long tarp banners to the front to stop them advancing and filming.
- Protect your escape routes by standing in them.
- Get those who have turned into spectators off the pavements, back in the crowd and moving around.

Of course, now having resisted being split up and penned in, they may just let fly with the baton charge. But at least you're now in a stronger position to deal with it and escape. Whatever happens next, don't just stand there waiting for it. If you've managed to get their line drawn far away, you've bought valuable time and space – so use it! Even if their line is right up against you, they still haven't broken down your numbers.

However, it's only a matter of time before the police try and get closer/break you up again. Use the time to get out of there slowly and in one block, this is the last thing they want – a large mob moving around freely. Whatever you do, don't stand there waiting for them to try again. You are now in control to go and do whatever you want, so do it. If they have blocked your only exit, try...

### **COUNTER ADVANCING**

This involves moving your lines forward into theirs, thus gaining more space and opening up more exits. Use the front line as a solid wall, linking arms and moving slowly forward. Use the long banner like a snowplough (this stops them grabbing you or breaking the line, they can still hit you with truncheons though). If there's enough of you WOMBLED up, your protective clothing will make that getaway that much safer and easier.

### **SNOW PLOWS**

A line of crowd control barriers can also be carried by the front line like a snowplough to break into the police ranks. The front of the 'plough' can then be opened once their line is breached and the barriers pushed to the side to contain the cops. This all needs a lot of co-ordination and balls, the advantage gained will not last long, so push all your ranks forward through the gap straight away.

### **USING YOUR BODY**

Your body is your best and most adaptable tool. It is best used in concert with others. For instance it could take a long time for twenty to scale a wall, but stand two people against the wall, bowed together with their arms locked and you've got a set of human steps! (Those waiting to climb can link arms around the steps to protect them). Always look for ways to use your body to escape.

### **RE-FORMING**

Keep looking for ways of increasing your numbers, by joining up with other groups and absorbing stragglers. Everyone has to get out and you'll stand a better chance of getting out unharmed, with all your belongings and equipment if you leave together at the same time.

### **SNATCH SQUADS**

When the police want to isolate and arrest an individual in a crowd they will usually employ a snatch squad.

Watch for groups of ten or so fully dressed cops, rallying behind the police lines. They will be instructed by evidence gatherers and a superior (you can often spot them pointing out the person to be snatched). The lines will open temporarily to let the squad through. Half the officers will perform the snatch, the other half will surround them with batons, hitting anyone who gets in the way. Once they have their target he/she is bundled away, back behind police lines.

Try and beat the snatch squad by:

1. Keeping the crowd moving around.
2. Spot the squad preparing.
3. If possible warn the target to get the hell out of the area.
4. Linking arms in an impenetrable wall in the squad's path.
5. Surround the squad once they are in the crowd and intimidate them so much that they panic and give up.
6. If you are being grabbed or pressure pointed, keep your head and arms moving. Don't lash out if you can help it, or you will end up with an assault charge too.

### **DE-ARRESTING**

The best time is to do this is as soon as the snatch has happened. You need a group who know how to break grips and some people to act as blockers. Once you've got your person back all link arms and move off into the crowd. The police may try and snatch back or arrest one of the de-arresters.

*This guide is an ongoing project. Please send your comments and additions to us for the next version, to 'Public Order Guide' c/o Manchester Earth First! Dept. 29, 255 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 5LW*

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