

Help fund Defend the Right to Protest

A special appeal by the campaign supported by John McDonnell MP and Louise Christian, human rights lawyer

Dear friends,

The unanimous not guilty verdict in the case of Alfie Meadows and Zak King is an important victory for the right to protest. Alfie's case was the most high profile of those that took place following the arrest of hundreds of students during the student protests in Autumn 2010. The trial exposed the police violence and intimidation experienced by many school and university students who were kettled for hours in freezing conditions, horse charged and batoned. One witness, a GP, talked about her experiences of treating a "stream" of head injuries in a makeshift hospital set up by protesters at Parliament Square.

Imprisonment

Unfortunately too many students ended up in jail and with a criminal record that could scar their lives forever. Time and again, these young people found themselves isolated and unable to defend themselves effectively. Often the campaign met them too late in the day. But not always. In one case we were able to put a college student waiting alone in court with a sympathetic lawyer - he went on to fight his case, win, and is now at university. We also launched a prisoner twinning campaign which provided support for imprisoned protesters and their families.

Successes

The campaign did make a difference. Overall 109 protesters were prosecuted, with 58 charged with violent disorder. In the vast majority of cases those who pleaded not guilty won their cases, 19 were acquitted and 12 went to prison. This compares to a similar operation in response to the protests against the assault on Gaza in 2009 where 72 protesters were charged with violent disorder and 62 went to prison. Although, there were other factors at play, it is also clear that having a major campaign has made an important difference.

DtRtP has played an active role in supporting other defence campaigns from the Fortnum & Mason occupiers to Trenton Oldfield, imprisoned for six months for protesting against inequality. We work to build a collective response to attacks on protest and to provide resources and practical support for those facing criminalisation. We have extended our support to other justice campaigns, including the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign, Hillsborough Justice Campaign and United Friends and Family Campaign and those pursuing justice for their loved ones including Sean Rigg, Christopher Alder, Mark Duggan and Ian Tomlinson.

Not over

The struggle for justice is not over: Alfie will now be campaigning to hold the police responsible for his injuries to account. Despite the success of students in fighting their cases, not a single officer has been charged with violence relating to the protests. We are therefore asking people to continue to support Alfie to show that we will not allow the police to act with impunity against those who march, demonstrate, occupy or strike.

We also intend to continue to challenge the use of kettling and excessive sentencing - in particular the use of the violent disorder charge under the Public Order Act to deter, punish and criminalise protesters.

The continuing struggles against austerity and cuts, from the bedroom tax to the health service, underlines the importance of a DtRtP network which works alongside activists to defend them against criminalisation and support those arrested and charged. The treatment of student protesters "breaking the austerity consensus" is part of a wider pattern of increased attacks on protest which have been strongly criticised by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of assembly in the UK. (see <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/AssemblyAssociation/Pages/SRFreedomAssemblyAssociationIndex.aspx>)

In order to continue this work we are asking supporters to donate to the campaign. As a grassroots network we are entirely reliant on the support of trade unions, campaigning groups and individuals to resource the work we do. We would also be grateful if those who can afford to, would pay a regular standing order to us.

Thanks again for all your support,

In Solidarity, Defend the Right to Protest

John McDonnell MP

Louise Christian human rights lawyer

Your money will help us to:

- Resource campaigns behind individual defendants
- Pay for bust cards
- Cover expenses incurred for court support
- Produce campaigning material such as flyers, stickers and placards
- Fund literature packs for defendants and families going through the court system
- Resource up to date research
- Extend our campaigning work nationally
- Host conferences and major public events
- Maintain a DTRTP contact phone line

How you can get involved:

- Organise a DTRTP meeting or invite a DTRTP speaker to a meeting at your trade union, student union, college, university campus or workplace. Alfie and Zak are happy to come and do meetings. Email info@defendtherighttoprotest.org
- Pass the DTRTP motion at your college, university or workplace
- Be part of a volunteer team at protests and other events to ensure people know their rights and about the campaign
- Help provide court support (sitting in public gallery, twinning with defendants)
- Follow and contribute to DTRTP's online
- Twin with an imprisoned protester
- Support prison protests and campaign protests
- Attend, publicise and contribute to DTRTP public meetings/events/activities
- To go on our mailing list contact info@defendtherighttoprotest.org

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For credit of account number 20265362
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Please cancel any existing standing orders to this account.