

Aldermaston Big Blockade: February 2010

Legal Observers Briefing

Your role basically involves: making sure everyone at the action has a **Bust Card**, recording details of those arrested, passing this on to the **Offsite Legal Support Team** and generally noting any information which might be useful in court.

Your group should have a least two people available to act as Legal Observers, so that we have at least two observers at each gate at all times. You can share the task, but even if you are "off duty", do not help out with other support roles. When the police move in to make arrests you have to be there on the spot prioritizing legal observing. Even before anyone is arrested, you need to watch and record what is happening, and keep watching until everyone has been arrested or has left the gate.

Your main responsibility is to record all arrests at your gate; this includes arrests of people you don't know or who are not in your group. If arrests start, try to position yourself where you can get a good view of what is going on.

The most crucial thing is getting the names of people being arrested.

Try to know the names of everyone in your group. If you know people by nicknames check that you know the name that they will be giving to the police. If you don't know the person's name, ask them, "What name are you giving?", and if you cannot get their name, write a description of the person. Also note down: the time they were arrested; the number of the arresting officer/s.

If the police use **excessive or unreasonable force** or pressure points, take the number/s of the police officer/s responsible. An injured person may want to make a complaint against the police, and your record will be important. Note the times of anything significant. Ask people around you to tell you what they saw, and take their name and mobile number, and whether they took any photos or videos, as they may need to be contacted later.

From the beginning of the action it is useful to have a general record of the atmosphere, of how the police respond, how many are there, when specialist cutting teams arrive, at what stage police cordons are established etc. you can also note:

? (Before arrests) Is a warning given? Who by? At what time? What do they say? (If you hear the words. "Section 12 " and "Designated protest area" or "Breach of the Peace" ring the Onsite Legal Support Team).

? Are people being cut out of lock-ons? Who by? How long does it take? Are the police being careful? (Generally they are, but even then people could possibly be hurt and if so you should note this.)

? Is there traffic actually present which is being stopped? Is it workers' traffic or is local traffic also held up? Can through traffic get past? This information may be helpful if someone wants to challenge the police's account in court.

Ask which **police station** people are being taken to. The most likely are Newbury and Loddon Valley (east Reading). If lots of people are arrested they may use: Reading (central), Slough and Abingdon.

Legal Observers are not **Police Liaison**. Other people will do this. Your job is to record what happens, not represent your group. If, however, you need to liaise on your own behalf (e.g. about staying near enough to see arrests if there is a police cordon) then ask to speak to the senior officer present. If there are problems with the police (e.g. not wearing numbers, excessive force), tell your Gate Support people who will inform the **Police Liaison**).

Although **Thames Valley Police** are familiar with the role of Legal Observers, you have no status in law. You can be arrested (e.g. for obstructing a police officer). If they want to cordon off an area they generally tell Legal Observers to get out of the way. Your role is not to be arrested, so move out of the way, and try to find somewhere else from where you can watch for arrests.

What to do if the police try to cordon off the blockaders and warn anyone not wanting to be arrested to leave the area. Try to stand as near as you can without risking arrest yourself. Shout out to the people inside the cordon that you are there and tell them how much you can see. They need to know that they need to keep you informed if you can't see what is going on.

If people are being cut out of lock-ons the MOD police cutting team usually establish a 'sterile area' around where they are working. This might just be a cordon of police officers but they often erect plastic screens if they are using cutting tools (partially for health and safety). This takes a great deal of time and faffing about so makes the blockade last longer. Sometimes Legal Observers can see underneath, around or over the fencing, or over it if you are tall, but you might need a running commentary from inside.

If the police keep people a long way back from the blockaders then see if you can stand near to the vans where people will be taken. How close you can get depends on the officers in charge but you should at least be able to see who is being taken away.

It is up to you at what point you **phone in the names** of those arrested to the Onsite Legal Support Team. They don't need them instantly; it is better to stay and keep an eye on the arrests. When you get a chance tell the Onsite Legal Support Team the gate, the names of people arrested, and the times they were arrested. It is also useful to know who, and how many people have been put into the same van, and where the van is going (if you can find out). Tell the Onsite Legal Support Team if anyone is injured.

Legal Observers need to stay at the gates until everyone leaves. Let the ONSITE LEGAL SUPPORT TEAM know when your group has stopped blockading. Keep your notes safe and dry as details may become important later.

If you need to stop Legal Observing then phone in to the ONSITE LEGAL SUPPORT, and tell them. WAIT until another observer turns up and make sure you fully brief them. Please don't just throw your tabard at someone and jump into a lock-on! The police will definitely stop Legal Observers being near to arrests if they think they are going to join in the action.

When everyone has left your gate, ring the ONSITE Legal Support Team, who will tell you where to meet (probably Mackie's café) for a **debriefing**. This is important and you must attend if at all possible.

Check-list of things to have with you

? You need to wear a **high visibility fluorescent vest** (it will be dark when the blockade starts, so this is also for your own safety). Write the words "LEGAL OBSERVER" in thick felt tip pen so that it is clearly visible on the back (and on the front if you wish). This helps both blockaders and police to identify you

? Spare Bust cards

? Spare Legal Briefings

? Spare Legal Registration Forms

? Mobile phone with fully charged battery and credit (and if possible spare battery). **This number must be sent to the ONSITE Legal Support Team, along with your name, name of your group and gate before 7 February**

- ? Felt tip pen, to write Legal support number on your arm, and to lend to blockaders to do the same
- ? Contact list of ONSITE LEGAL SUPPORT TEAM and other support people
- ? Notebook or clipboard and spare pens and pencils (use pencil if it rains, it doesn't run)
- ? Headtorch if you have one as this makes writing in the dark at the start of the blockade easier
- ? Rucksack with food and drink, and spare clothing if raining

You do not need a camera. It can get in the way, and hopefully others will be taking photos (including the police)

THE LEGAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

This is slightly different to the Faslane system, but the basic model is the same, as is the aim: to ensure that we know where everyone who is arrested is being held, so that we can pick them up after release; and if they are not released, to find out why and if necessary get them a lawyer.

- Everyone coming to the action has a **Bust Card** (which will be downloadable from the website a month before the blockade) with phone numbers for Legal Support Teams, both ONSITE and OFFSITE and solicitor and a **Legal Briefing**
- Everyone has filled in a **Legal Support Registration Form** that is already on the website in downloadable form and will either have sent them in to the address on top of the form beforehand or will hand them into the gate support who will get them to the OFFSITE Legal Support Team
- At least two people are present at any one time at each gate acting as **Legal Observers**
- Legal Observers report arrests to the **Onsite Legal Support Team** who will keep track of people through the police system. People who have been arrested ask the police to inform the Onsite Legal Support Team where they are being held
- The **Onsite Legal Support Team** reports arrests and where people are being held to the **Offsite Legal Support Team**
- The **Offsite Legal Support Team** handle the legal registration forms and keep in touch with the Onsite Legal Support Team
- The Onsite Legal Support Team find out when the police are going to release people and informs the Offsite Legal Support Team who work with the **Transport Support** who co-ordinate lifts to pick them up

- The Offsite Legal Support Team phone should be used if people have questions about their friends who have been arrested and whether they have been released
- If people are held overnight to appear in court the Onsite Legal Support Team check in with the solicitor and arrange **Court Support**