

SNATCH SQUADS

When the police want to isolate (and arrest) an individual in a crowd, they will usually employ a snatch squad - they tend to be quite slow.

Watch for groups of ten or so fully dressed up 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 s/he is bundled away, back behind police lines. They'll only risk coming so far in to the crowd, and if you let the squad in and then close up behind them, they're likely to just try and get the hell out of there.

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 squads path (ready to meet their batons?)
- 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 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. Sometimes there are easier opportunities. 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. It's easy for opportunities to descend into more people arrested farce, so be wary.

* for legal info go to activistslegalproject.org.uk * for medical info go to actionmedics.org.uk
* for links to many direct action tactics & guides, including blockading, go to earthfirst.org.uk and click on Resources * for other useful stuff go to schnews.org.uk/diyguide

This guide is an ongoing project. This version was updated in May 2013.

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Please send your police observations, comments and additions to us for inclusion in the next version.

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A GUIDE TO PUBLIC ORDER SITUATIONS

[Note: police tactics are currently in flux, with post-G20 inquiries driving 'dialogue' and government ministers espousing more nasty toys - these changes are important, so please feedback any new tactics they are using, anything you've tried, whether it worked or not.]

The aim of this guide is not to show you how to conduct a riot. Neither is it intended as a critique on the pros and cons of fighting with the police.

Bear in mind that the police are much better equipped and trained for close combat than you or I. They will have been psyching themselves up for hours, have plenty of reserves standing by and will feel confident with the law behind them. Beating the police is about outwitting them - not necessarily hitting them over the head - keeping in mind your original aims. (Just for the record: the authors believe history has proven that engaging with the police on their terms is not likely to result in lasting social change).

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.

THE AIMS AND METHODS OF THE STATE

British law has traditionally been concerned with keeping the peace more so than solving or preventing; more recently this has changed. The roots of such public order policing can be traced back to the common law offences introduced to control the havok 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 or not 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 still act as if it did.

The police have a 2010 public order manual (now under review). This has historically given 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, then contain or disperse them
- 2) To provoke violence as a way of justifying their actions and flushing out any ringleaders
- 3) To stop the trouble spreading
- 4) To intimidate and break the spirit of the crowd
- 5) To gather intelligence and 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.

If you can't be arsed to read it all then here is the hyper-edited version:

- Don't be tempted to stand there and fight - get out to where you can still cause some damage or disruption without the police around.
- Keep moving around, as a group and individually. Fill gaps. Never stand still.
- Crowd divisions and the formation of police lines must be nipped 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.
- 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, even a fairly high proportion of the really pissed-up ones. But with a bit of forethought you can turn surviving a public order situation into living a public 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, free and that 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) Getting you and your mates away safely
- 2) Finding a place to cause embarrassment and economic damage to your real target
- 3) Helping others in trouble by administering first aid and de-arresting.

STICKING TOGETHER

Always try to form an affinity group before setting out, and at the very least have a buddy system in place, whereby everybody has one person to look out for them 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 issues 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. It also makes the classic 'let's stick together' agreement breaking up into 'individuals-wandering-off-at-the-first-opportunity' less likely. 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, (bicycle) 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.

Pay attention to what you are going to wear in advance. Although not many people want to go to a protest or demo dressed in full body armour, consider precautions that are discrete, adaptable, easy to use and discard. Thinking about these threats in advance will help:

1) Surveillance

The purpose is to collect intelligence, evidence and to intimidate. Evidence gatherers (EVGs) will specifically focus on individuals in order to get a conviction, whereas the more independent Forward Intelligence Team (FIT) will target people they know. The newer smiling face of evil are the Protest Liaison Officers (PLOs), 'facilitating dialogue'. Though the functions are different, all footage can be used for any purpose.

The cut-off sleeve of a long-sleeved T-shirt (or a head-over) makes a good mask. Wear it casually around your neck. If you wear glasses, use a cut-off section of a short 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 are a hippy type, until you need it.

Get those who have turned into spectators off the pavements and moving around. Of course, now having resisted being split up and penned in, they may just let fly with the baton charge. Fair enough, but you're 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, space & potentially useful exits - so use them! Even if their line is right up against you, they still haven't broken down your numbers.

However, its only a matter of time before the police try and get closer or 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 our 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. You can work together as a well-padded affinity group; be wary of being targeted by snatch squads or more violence; also the cops may treat the whole situation differently. Use a long banner like a snowplow (this stops them grabbing you or breaking the line, they can still hit you with truncheons though). Reinforce it with uprights and handles to grip it tight. If it can be high or with a 'top' to it/second banner, you may protect your heads from getting whacked, and provide cover to change clothes, open up escape routes, etc. Wrap the ends in on themselves so the police can't easily grab it. Hide behind and hold on tight.

SNOW PLOWS

An arrow-shaped phalanx, with or without a line of crowd control barriers, can also be carried by the front line like a snowplow to break into the police ranks. The point of the 'plow' 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. A small group can use this tactic to break out.

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 20 to scale a wall, but stand two people against the wall, bowed together with their arms locked with two more crouched at their feet and you've got a set of human steps! (Those waiting to climb can link arms around the steps to protect them) You can try to step through police lines by shifting your weight and body side-on - but beware of losing your balance and ending up on the deck the wrong side! Attitude above all is what will get you through. Always look for ways to use your body to escape.

REFORMING

Keep looking for ways of increasing your numbers, by joining up with other groups and absorbing stragglers. Try to provide crowds either side of a police line - they'll get jumpy about what they themselves call the Blakelock Sandwich, and will withdraw. 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.

- 2) They want to gather more evidence/flush out more 'ringleaders'. 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 outnumber them or are in danger of gaining the upper hand.

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/chemical spray attack penned in crowds to lower morale
- 4) Charges that slowly push you down a street, sometimes backed up by vans or dogs (rush of cops -> fall back -> strengthen line -> repeat)
- 5) Crowds throwing missiles will be 'put to flight' - it's harder to throw stuff if you are running)
- 6) Shift changes (often look like 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 is 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 us if they can, weakening our 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:

They 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. Sometimes they'll have lines of police either side of the road, who join up to divide the crowd. Other times the few cops scattered through the crowd slowly become a solid line before you notice. Think how you can use drummers or other tactics to channel the energy of the crowd. 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 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
- Mix into their forming line - or outflank 'em in advance
- Get long (thick lorry) tarp banners to the front to stop them advancing and filming
- Protect your escape routes by standing in them

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. Cameras can also be in helmets, ear-pieces, on uniforms, or mobile on or in vehicles. Sunglasses give good protection against harmful rays including UV and CCTV.

2) Truncheon and 'offensive use of shield' blows

A placard makes a good temporary shield and light strips of plastic under your clothing on the forearm could offer some subtle protection, as do 'padded' baseball caps. More obvious padding can be used strategically, though may make you a target. The best protective clothing however is a good pair of running shoes.

3) CS and Pepper Spray

Used to disperse crowds or subdue you, through temporary irritation or pain. They can get under contact lenses, stick to natural-fibre clothing, oil-based make-up and lotions. Stay calm and call for a street medic if available. Otherwise, get yourself out of the area, don't rub it in, remove contaminated clothing and try to keep your eyes open so the wind can help it evaporate, or flush (not dilute) it out with much cold or tepid water.

4) Baton charges

If you want to take a banner, use a long strip of plastic haulage tarpaulin (taught-liner) that can be used as a movable barrier to stop charging police, or for you to advance behind (see more info in the Counter Advancing section later in this guide). Generally cops only advance 20 yards or so, then stop, regroup, then again. Panic stampeding and fear are often worse dangers. Check section 6. on barricades - under Defending - below.

5) Dogs

Increasingly used even for 'hippy riots' - generally used to intimidate, reinforce thin lines or hold sterile zones behind a police line or charge. Bark, bite, release... They are well-trained, command driven, and trained to scare you. If brave, make padding (e.g. old tyres) for your lower arm and give 'em a chew, to help others get past; disguise it or you may make yourself a target for snatch squads. They target individuals only, so either crowd them, or best be the sacrificial lamb!

6) Horses

They try to keep in formation. Used to disperse a crowd, get it moving or panicking, to make space in a crowd for cops on foot, or in small groups, siding-on to push the crowd. So fill space behind horses, and try not to panic. Suspend nets at horse rider level, ie. above your head height and just right for volleyball. Make staggered barricades, or scatter debris - they don't need to be high. The horses'll jump and then slide, and their riders will fall. Warning: contains scenes of potential human/horse harm and gluten - bring your parent along.

7) Vans

They've been used side-on as large mobile fences for containment, sometimes as a second line of defence, and rarely to break up or move crowds. Used to pre-emptively take space where we're going to be, for later tactical use.

8) 'Iron Horse' metal walls

Usually set-up in advance for planned containment or route blocking and channeling.

9) Tasers

Increasingly used in public order situations if not large crowd situations; shocking.

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 section 6. below) or protecting others.

Here are some ideas:

1. Keep **looking outwards**. Your friends shouldn't be insulted by you not looking at them when talking - face towards any potential threat, e.g. the boys and girls in blue.
 2. **Form cordons** as much as possible. Anything the police want, including buildings and especially sound systems, need a strong outwardly-facing cordon. Things may be quiet and you'll feel like a prick linking arms with complete strangers, but do it. Repeat this mantra: 'Its not a hippy peacenik thang, its 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 or belt of the person in front, repeat along the line, asking permission first. Its virtually unbreakable, and will leave a hand free.
 3. Someone needs to **watch the police from a good vantage point, or have spotters** on bicycles, so that their next move can be pre-empted. Remember, give info about what's happening, not instructions. 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...
 4. **Sitting down** is very occasionally good for dissuading the senior officer from making the decision to charge, but you should only do it in large numbers and the crowd needs to feel confident. It has worked in situations where the decision has yet been made how to move us, or where they don't have enough officers. It has not worked when they've already made the decision or started moving. It's about making it too hard for them, not relying on their humanity. Most often it doesn't work, and the first lines will get seriously injured, as you are immobile and vulnerable.
 5. **Throwing stuff as a defensive tactic**. Throwing stuff with the aim of harming the police doesn't work and is counterproductive - it only winds them up so they hit you harder. If you want to throw do it defensively, strategically and en masse - a constant hail of debris creates 'sterile zones' into which the police won't want to go, thus keeping them at arms length. Paint on cops' visors, aimed especially at higher ranks and intelligence gatherers, can be a temporary advantage. Rape alarms etc chucked into their lines will make it difficult for them to give or get orders, and disorientate them.
- Remember:** don't throw to attack or cause injury. Only throw from near the front, then disappear into the crowd. Only wankers throw from the back.
6. Solid impassable **barricades** are more hassle than they're worth - it will 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, one of the best defences against baton and horse charges. Horses can't easily charge over them, police find it hard to hold a line in amongst them, but individuals can easily pick their way through. Police think, act and move in lines.

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 : however, keep focussed on your aims. **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.

BASIC POLICE CHOREOGRAPHY

Remember the Trinity - Control, Contain, Disperse

Police tactics are changing following the London G20 policing reviews, the 2010 student demos, and the 2011 TUC march disturbances and the August riots. London especially has seen the use of 'Total Policing' - basically, more of them more on top of us, surrounding and in plain clothes in amongst us. They have tended to treat demos the same as public order situations (though 'hippy riots' are dealt with differently than 'real riots'). After gaining control, they will likely try to contain the crowd for many hours, only letting people out one by one after all the energy has left and bladders are full, who then disperse of their own accord; 'the Kettle' is a pressurised advancement of containment. The legal situation in practice is still unclear - they will try to intimidate you to get your photo, details, and search you. However, you **never** have to give them your details unless they have arrested you, you are being summonsed or charged with a specified anti-social behaviour, or you are driving a vehicle (in England and Wales). While you are contained, they may try to snatch squad or provoke some people. If they're still letting people in, that point is a potential weak-spot through which to break out. When not using containment tactics, they will likely disperse and block crowds to keep them unfocussed and in smaller groups.

Know the area in advance. Share ideas beforehand of how to avoid/break up from outside/get out of a containment situation. The best solution is to keep the crowd moving and fluid so it can't get contained, watching out for police lines forming (see 'Stopping Lines forming' below). Next best if they manage it is to break the stalemate. Help the penned-in crowd. Build up a crowd on the 'free' side of the cops to surround 'em if there's enough of you, get a band of drummers outside the contained crowd, or push their lines from the outside if appropriate. Be unexpected (in meeting place and tactics). Make 'bust-out cards' on the back of the action fliers. Be inventive - this is a situation where we need to come up with new ideas (and send them to us to include).

With any crowd the police will be looking to control it as soon as possible. Crowd dispersal is achieved with baton charges, horse charges and sometimes chemical sprays, dogs 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 dispersal. This stalling time is often just dithering by the commanding officer, or psyching/tooling up time for the troops (the later is easy to spot). Before they are 'stood to' (on standby in van in riot gear), they get changed usually outside the van, and therefore vulnerable to a group forming near/ amongst them - they may have to move or take back their space. The 'slack time' also may be them setting up a Cordon Sanitaire, a sterile zone to isolate you from a wider observing crowd who may otherwise get involved. This aside, there are only 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 are going to disperse you to