

Diary of an Anarchist Communist Road Protester

Resistance at Newbury

Anarchist Communist Federation

1996

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Numerous anarchist communist militants have been involved in the resistance at Newbury, as they are at other road-building projects. Here, one comrade shares his experiences and impressions.

Fluffy Heaven

We get a good crowd together but problems at home force people to drop out. Five are left ranging Freedom Network Fluffy to anarchist communist (me). Arrive in Newbury late afternoon. After touring the countryside find the 'visitors camp' following the map and directions sent out from the Third Battle of Newbury group and clued up from the Friends of The Earth Internet sites. The visitors camp is on a friendly farmer's land just off the A34 and consists of a small office, cooking area, dis-washing area, wood-cutting area, large communal bender and planning office (another bender !).

We entered the Camp to the sound of drums, fiddles, whistles, tired, dirty faces and no conversation. After a while a 'non-violent direct action' workshop was announced for new arrivals and I found myself in Fluffy Heaven. Monica (local drama lecturer) took charge and the overriding theme was save trees (not people) — a blinkered, single-issue night where new recruits are told in no uncertain terms the acceptable scope of action. The workshop did answer the right questions for newcomers: security and police violence, bust-sheets, preparations for getting into and staying up trees. It explained current tactics and police strategies and gave the overall picture: 9 camps established, one on 48 hours notice of eviction and in desperate need of support. Many tree houses built over 9 miles of rural Berkshire, trees spiked and marked for chainsaw operators, tunnels with props for protestors to D-Lock onto — if they're pulled out, out come the props and Later by the camp fire I discussed 'alternative' action with a protester who had spent several weeks on-site. He was keen to establish a team to sabotage the guard's coaches (with which I agreed) but I had to hit the sack when other people started screaming at him for such potentially ruinous proposals. Autonomy...

Direct Action

Most people were asleep early as it is most effective for tree-dwellers to be up, fed, watered and ready to fill available transport once the message has come over the CB where the contractors are going to hit. The aim is to delay start of work by getting ahead of the game. Surprisingly, several coaches and police convoy can be hard to spot in a network of country lanes! Chaos descends (on them !) and the hierarchy of a modern security company starts to overload. Red helmets screech orders, yellow helmets manage the muddle in the middle, the white helmets at the bottom just stand in a line looking bored (although mid-day brings out the doggy-bags and a few smiles). Worst are the green helmets, Brays Private Detective Agency, hired by the Government just to compile lists of protestors. Arrive on time and you get stuck in, arrive late and you're relegated to a support role throwing supplies into the trees — a difficult job with security cordons around them. The cordons move on once a tree has been felled. I saw one red helmet trying to drag a woman out of a small tree. Not allowed (!) but he only stopped when Julian Cope and a swarm of journos arrived. I asked Cope if he'd be climbing any trees. No, he only had limited time and would rally the troops with cider and tobacco.

Some protestors shout abuse from close range at the robotic security guards, a tactic frowned on but people also make jokes at the guards expense and some even laugh at themselves. It's this maybe that has led several to defect to the protestors or simply chuck the job. Everybody is filming everybody else. I was caught by surprise by a camera in some bushes ! Shouting at guards just brings Brays and police evidence gathering teams (they have EG on their jackets, very hush-hush). At the moment the strategy is to avoid a massive police clampdown as progress has been slow and the battle could be extended for another twelve months. There is no doubt that these actions bring delay and therefore increase the cost to the contractors, forcing them to think twice before tendering for further work.

Unfortunately we couldn't visit all the camps and speak to the residents. The majority were middle-class with a fair amount of punks, travellers and homeless, a few marginally class-conscious. Equality and Co-operation through Direct Action did open things up. Mention of the Job-Seekers Allowance led to a lively camp fire discussion. As for the future of Direct Action in the anti-road/car culture struggle, I believe the hard core of protestors will continue undeterred even though facing lack of support during cold weather and increasing attacks via surveillance, benefit withdrawals and arrest. However, the collective buzz, on-site entertainment etc make a trip worthwhile.

Anarchist Communist Consciousness

Anarchists and those genuinely committed to bringing about a libertarian society should not write off such protests. The communal meals, necessary co-operation, mutual aid and support create a good vibe we should be building on. Anarchists should be opposing the expansion of capitalist markets and structures by spreading ideas to sympathetic ears. Perhaps out of the 'hordes' of anarchists at Newbury (according to the media !), an anarchist-communist consciousness will develop. Although the Greens and Friends Of The Earth are running the show and stealing the glory from the Newbury protest, I feel many of the resident tree dwellers are likely to move on to spikier forms of protest.

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