



## liberty central Protest

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## Letters

## Domestic extremists or ordinary citizens?

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At the end of its recent inquiry, entitled A Surveillance Society?, the home affairs select committee rejected "crude characterisations of our society as a surveillance society". The select committee may need to revisit that assessment following the revelations about secret police databases storing details of potential "domestic extremists" ([Police forces challenged over secret protest files](#), 27 October).

With the home secretary confirming there is no definition for a "domestic extremist", I will be writing to the Association of Chief [Police](#) Officers (Acpo). I want to know whether my details have been added to the database because I attended the G20 protests as a legal observer on 1 April and was kettled for five hours with thousands of protesters.

The police must be able to maintain law and order, but do they really need a vast surveillance apparatus to deliver the public's priorities?

**Tom Brake MP***Lib Dem home affairs spokesman*

● Mark Thomas talks about "three secret police units" ([Doth I protest too much?](#), 26 October), but a quick search online shows that the National Public Order Intelligence Unit has its own [Wikipedia entry](#) and appears in Home Office documents, the National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit

(Netcu) has its [own website](#) and the National Domestic Extremist Team was mentioned in your pages as long ago as 2006. Your general drift is right though. Many people who like direct action are not "extremists", and the police should recalibrate their nomenclature.

Even if we accept that "peaceful direct action" is not extremist, we need not drift along with Mr Thomas's implication that all protestors should be treated as though they were virtuous. A great deal of "peaceful" protest is designed to provoke confrontation with the police by creating obstruction, breaching fences or occupying offices and industrial or military plants.

The ordinary citizenry is well within its rights to want the police to do all they legally can to identify campaigners who naively, intentionally or disingenuously play ducks and drakes with civil disobedience, rather than seek to persuade us of the merits of their case. When the protesters stop the stunts, the police will have no excuse for the surveillance.

### **Richard D North**

*Fellow, [Social Affairs Unit](#)*

- It's good to hear the head of Netcu, Superintendent Steve Pearl, state, "I've never said - and we don't see - that any environmentalist is going to or has committed any violent acts" ([How a group of kids, clowns and campers were treated as a serious threat to the country](#), 27 October). If this is the case, then why are police dogs used at Camp for Climate Action events? At our [Ratcliffe-on-Soar demonstration](#) this month at least 10 people were bitten by police dogs, yet were not subsequently arrested for any offence. This is a troubling step up from the usual camera-in-your-face intimidation. We hope that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's report on the policing of protest will recommend that dogs are not used at demonstrations in future.

### **Ed Thompson**

*Camp for Climate Action*

- Now almost 85 and referred to in your report ([Activists repeatedly stopped and searched as officers 'mark' cars](#), 26 October), I would like to add the following:

In the late 40s and 50s, under McCarthyism, my post was regularly opened. At a recent protest against an arms company, a police officer blurted out my father's rank in the first world war, making me realise that information had even been gathered about deceased family members. Hoping to travel to Spain in a "marked protest vehicle", I am left wondering whether Orwell will come to haunt me, as information gathered could trip the wire at border controls.

How long before I am put under a "control order" as lashed out on Muslim families like the subjugation of Jews and others under nazism?

### **John Catt**

*Brighton*

- I was surprised to see a good friend listed as a "domestic extremist". He is the gentlest father of two that you could ever wish to meet. If my friend is a fair representative of domestic extremism then clearly they represent no threat at all. But such excessive monitoring makes one wonder why taxpayers' money is being so foolishly wasted.

## **Ruth Kelly**

*Manchester*

- I note that the Guardian continues its attack on the animal protection community ([How police rebranded lawful protest as 'domestic extremism'](#), 26 October) in describing the disturbing increase in the use of police intelligence in targeting legitimate protest.

The use of such phrases as "tackling criminals involved in animal rights", "many of these activists were prepared to resort to violence" and "the police were successful in jailing many of the animal rights campaigners who were committing crimes" is deliberately inflammatory and highly disingenuous. As with all other protest "groups" the majority of those people engaged in animal protection protests are peaceful, law-abiding citizens engaged in legitimate protest. Why does the Guardian refer to such protesters as "militants", while climate camp attendees remain "protesters"?

The Guardian criticises the worrying police tactic of rebranding legitimate protest as domestic extremism and yet is guilty of exactly the same kind of deliberate manipulation of language.

## **Richard J Deboo**

*Deputy leader, Animals Count*

- I hope the one to two million people who marched against the Iraq war would agree with me that we need a badge saying "Domestic extremist". I would wear mine with pride next to my CND badge.

## **Pat Parkin-Moore**

*Croft, Leicestershire*

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