



Opinion Protest

 This article is more than **13 years old**

I've been protesting for 70 years - I'm not going to stop now

John Catt

The police have labelled me a 'domestic extremist' and recorded my activities - but it has only strengthened my resolve

Sat 11 Feb 2012 11.00 GMT



Having listened to arguments for and against my judicial review against the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Metropolitan police on Thursday - [who branded me a "domestic extremist"](#), placed me on a database and secretly recorded my activities merely because I attend demonstrations and make sketches - I feel more resolute than ever about safeguarding our civil liberties.

I am 87 and have been protesting for some 70 years or more. I am retired and live in Brighton not far from where I grew up in Shoreham. Right from my formative years, I stood up against oppressive and unjust behaviour. When I was 14 I worked as a farm labourer in Coombe, Sussex. Most of the workers were elderly; the younger ones were off fighting in the second world war.

The workers were not being paid on time, and one day we were made to wait in the pouring rain for a very long time for our wages. I demanded that the farmer paid up straight away; it was the first time I spoke up for the rights of others and I have been doing so ever since.

I volunteered to fight in the second world war at the age of 17 and joined the Royal Air Force. The country was confronted with a dictatorship, which, if unchallenged, would have resulted in a Nazi occupation. For me, this would have represented the complete loss of our hard-won rights and freedoms, intolerance towards any one with independent and dissenting views, data gathering and the carting off to concentration camps of ethnic minorities and political activists.

To a large degree my experiences in the second world war have informed my political opinions, and having seen at first-hand the devastation that war causes, I became compelled to protest my opposition to military conflict around the world and also my support for racial equality. I saw the futility of war where innocent civilians, as well as military personnel, lost their lives on a large scale. I also witnessed the unjustified destruction of people's lives and property.

Even during the war, my protesting did not stop. I was sentenced to 28 days' confinement to barracks (CB) for protesting against the shocking conditions within a sick bay under fighter command - a sick bay for the treatment of RAF personnel. I received a further 28 days' CB while serving in a unit in France when I protested about the black market, which affected food rationing in my unit.

Due to my political activities, during the McCarthy era my post was routinely opened with no intention of concealing the fact that it had been done. The domestic extremist database that I am on gives me a chilling reminder of that period.

I am fortunate to be able to protest at my age. This is in part thanks to my reasonable health and, of course, strong conviction. Nowhere do I see MPs

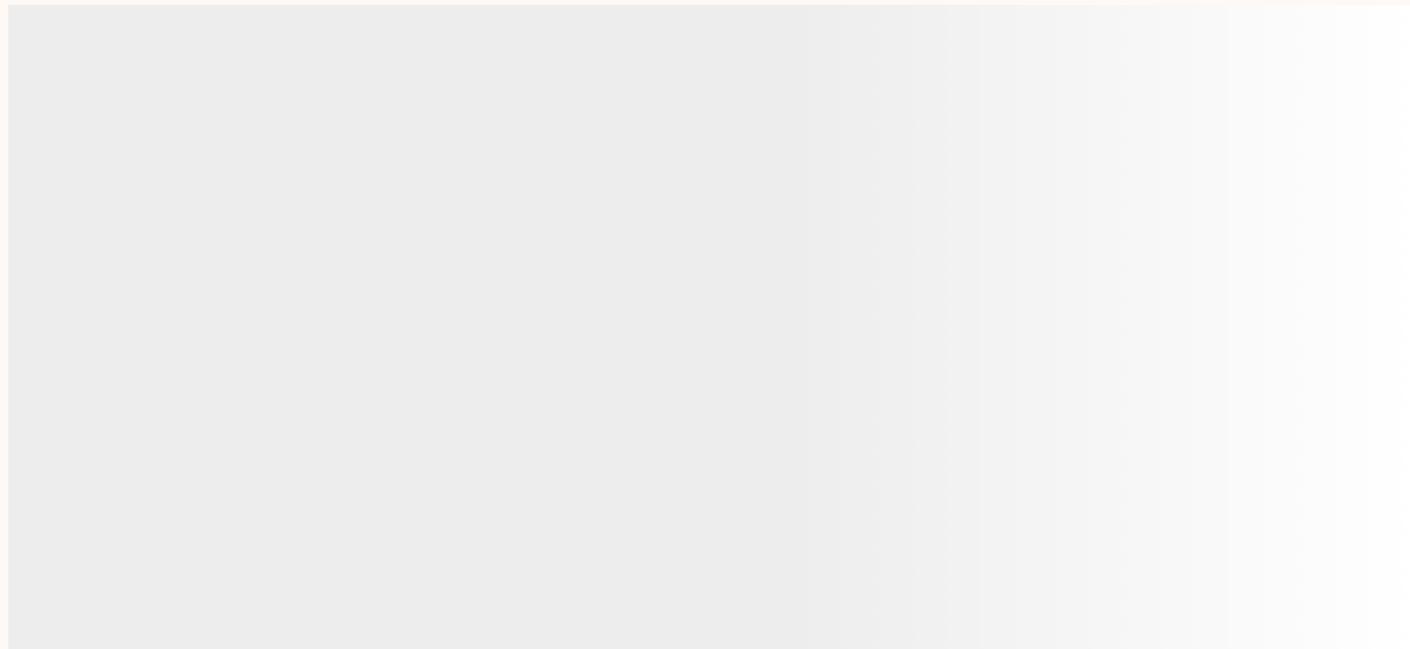
taking to the streets, let alone raising the burning issues about the erosion of our civil liberties and the ever-increasing state intrusion into our lives. You do not need to be a political activist to feel this - we are all in our everyday lives being subjected to some form of arbitrary surveillance as well as data gathering.

My interest in sketching protests is intrinsically linked to my political convictions. My ability to do so at my age is like having a living hand that sees just like Orwell did, but in words.

I would like to see the reversal of the erosion of civil liberties in this country, where the police state is assuming the role of perpetual inquisition; it destroys faith and trust between the individual and the state. I am particularly opposed to control orders and detention without trial both here and in the US. If this is not reminiscent of Nazi Germany, then what is?

No wonder I cannot sleep at night and hence my fight, whether it be in the form of protest, words or artwork, has to continue.

● Follow Comment is free on Twitter [@commentisfree](https://twitter.com/commentisfree)



Most viewed