

# London witnesses' restrictions to the right to protest at King Charles' Coronation

On Saturday, the leaders of the #notmyking protest were arrested without explanation or reason, after being given assurances that the police had no plans to interfere, along with a journalist filming Just Stop Oil protesters and charity volunteers later in the night. The Metropolitan Police has since said it regrets the arrests and has provided retroactive reasoning for its actions.

New powers granted by the recently passed Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act seem to have been used by police for King Charles III's Coronation. The bill was given Royal Assent on 28th April, more than a month ahead of schedule, with many eyeing the approaching Coronation as motive for fast-tracking the legislation, as well as ongoing protests from the environmental group, Extinction Rebellion. The Act gives the Home Secretary broad powers to make regulations without Parliament and to decide on the type of protest deemed acceptable or unacceptable. The new law also includes an offence of "intentionally or recklessly causing public nuisance". The law is controversial, and has received fierce criticism due to the impact on free expression, freedom of speech and the right to protest in the United Kingdom.

On the morning of the Coronation, the leaders of Republic, a campaign group for the end of the British Monarchy and the establishment of an elected head of state, were arrested while unloading their van of placards and banners. Freelance journalists at the scene attempted to get clarification from attending officers as to the reason for arrests but were told it would not be discussed further. Other incidents included the arrest of a freelance journalist covering Just Stop Oil protesters on the grounds of "conspiracy to commit a public nuisance" despite his press accreditation being on display. Shockingly, the overreach of police actions also later entailed the arrest of volunteers for the charity Night Stars, which aids people on Westminster's streets at night, confiscating the rape alarms they hand out to vulnerable women.

The Metropolitan Police has this week released a statement via Twitter that the arrested leaders of the #notmyking protest have been released with no further action being taken and expressing regret for their arrests. However, they also defended their actions by stating they received information people were looking to "seriously disrupt" the event and upon searching the van they found placards and items they believed could be used as "lock-on devices". Locking-on is used by protesters to make it difficult to remove them from their place of protest and is prohibited in the new Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act. The Met Police claim that the attending officers were not aware of engagement between Republic and their own Protest Liaison Team, despite being informed at the time of arrest by Republic's leadership. They also acknowledge that "Those arrested stated the items would be used to secure their placards, and the investigation has been unable to prove intent to use them to lock on and disrupt the event."

Sadiq Khan, the Labour Mayor of London, has requested further clarity from the Met police with regards to the right to peaceful protest. As one of the first tests of new policing powers and the right to protest, this episode has been a shocking indictment of an increasingly authoritarian government in the birthplace of Liberalism.