

Introduction



Legal systems are different in every country. However, for actions where it is likely that participants will be arrested, it is always useful to have a 'legal support team'. This advice on forming such a team in Britain is adapted from the first section of a much longer briefing by the Activist Legal Project at:

<http://www.activistslegalproject.org.uk>

Legal support may be a background but it can be absolutely vital. You may be the last home after the action, often spending hours hanging around police stations waiting for activists to be released. You won't share the glamour or get photographed, but without legal support some actions aren't possible. Perhaps if you weren't there, half of those at the 'front-end' of the action wouldn't take part!

What are the Aims of Legal Support?

- To make sure everyone going on the action is prepared for arrest
- To liaise with police and solicitors to ensure that arrested activists have appropriate support whilst in custody
- To ensure that once released activists have the emotional and practical support they need

Legal Support Group Roles

The number of people involved in the legal support group will depend upon the size of the action and the number of arrests expected. A number of essential roles have to be fulfilled:

- Preparing a written legal briefing for the action, including information on arrest procedure, what happens at the police station, likely offences, likely outcomes, bail and first court hearing.
- Preparing and distributing 'bustcards' to people going on the action - these contain phone numbers in case of arrest
- Staffing a phone line (the legal support number), waiting for calls from detainees at police stations.
- Co-ordination - preparing and updating a definitive list of who has been arrested, including their contacts details, and whether they have been released
- Police station support - giving support at the police station(s) to arrestees, liaising with solicitors at the police station(s) and meeting detainees on their release from custody
- Logistics - organising vehicles, drivers, and possibly accommodation to collect and house people released from police custody
- Organise a defendants' meeting after the action

Unlike legal observers, who do risk arrest by joining activist on the ground, the Legal Support Group should at no stage jeopardise their position with regard to arrest. You are no use to anyone on the inside of a police cell!

For more information on setting up a legal support for a big mass action 'Setting up a legal team' on the US based website: <http://www.midnightspecial.net>

For Further legal information and workshops contact

Legal Activist Project

info (at) activistslegalproject.org.uk

<http://www.activistslegalproject.org.uk>

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