



18 MARCH 2021

BLACK PROTEST LEGAL SUPPORT (“BPLS”)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

ON TUESDAY EVENING, FOUR OF OUR LEGAL OBSERVERS WERE ARRESTED, WITH TWO TAKEN TO POLICE CUSTODY, AT PROTESTS HELD AGAINST THE POLICE, CRIME, SENTENCING AND COURTS (“PCSC”) BILL.

An attack on Legal Observers is an attack on vital community movements that hold the police to account. Legal Observers are volunteers, independent of the protest, who monitor police conduct on the ground and provide legal support to those attending or arrested.

Since being established in May 2020, our Legal Observers from Black, Brown and Racialised Groups (“BBRG”) [have disproportionately and consistently faced police intimidation, aggression and violence at protests](#). Despite this, all of our Legal Observers continue to show up for our communities who are resisting state violence and police brutality.

At Tuesday’s protest, we again witnessed a heavy police presence. As the protest tailed off whilst marching through central London, it was clear the police - large in number - were intent on making arrests.

As the police began arresting protesters, our Legal Observers were recording these arrests as their role requires them to do. They were all wearing marked high-vis jackets and were visibly writing in their notebooks. The police reacted to this basic and fundamental monitoring with their characteristic aggression, [witnessed too often in the past year](#). Four of our Legal Observers were arrested. Three were from a BBRG background. The sheer fact that it was largely BBRG Legal Observers who were arrested on Tuesday sadly does not surprise us. They are all now represented by Black and Brown lawyers who are protest specialists.

BPLS is absolutely clear that Legal Observers are present in an independent, voluntary capacity, and therefore fall squarely within Exemption 2 of the Tier 4 Coronavirus regulations for “*the purpose of work or to provide voluntary or charitable services*”¹. They have the right to be present at protests and should not be prevented from monitoring the police through harassment or arrest.

As the [UN Human Rights Committee has said](#), Legal Observers “*must not face reprisals or other harassment...if an assembly is declared unlawful or is dispersed, that does not terminate the right to monitor*”. Taking away our right to monitor takes away key safeguards from police violence. It also takes away our ability to ensure the right to protest is upheld, as protected by Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The police routinely fail to respect these rights and have been emboldened to suppress dissent by Coronavirus regulations as well as the current PCSC Bill. However, no current or future legislation can impose a blanket ban on protest. Any attempt to do so is an affront to our civil liberties and will egregiously furnish this Government with further power and impunity. We know all too well that it will be our communities at the sharp end of this draconian response.

BPLS condemns [the recent racialised targeting and harassment](#) of Black activists by the police, preventing them from exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms. This targeting has made it unsafe for them to attend recent demonstrations. We stand with and support our Legal Observers who were arrested on Tuesday, and with all our volunteers who have been threatened or harmed by the police.

We will not allow the police to intimidate us. We remain committed to effective and independent monitoring of protests and we will continue to hold the police to account.

NOTE TO EDITORS:

Black Protest Legal Support is a group of Black and Brown lawyers, founded by Ife Thompson. We act as Legal Observers, gather evidence of arrests and counter police intimidation of Black Lives Matter and anti-racist activists. We have a hub of 250+ volunteer barristers and solicitors who can provide free legal representation to those arrested or impacted by police violence at protests.

For further information please contact: blackprotestlegal@protonmail.com

¹ The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) All Tiers (England) Regulations 2020, Schedule 3A, s2(5)(a): <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2020/1374/schedule/3A>