

The Tory contempt for campaigning

Published: January 13, 2026, 2:34 am

Tory MP and former minister Nick Herbert has an [article in the Guardian this morning](#) that reveals his (and I suspect many in his party's) contempt for modern campaigning. Contrasting those who marched on Washington 50 years ago with today's campaigners he says:

[W]e are rightly suspicious about many of those who so readily resort to direct action today. There's something phoney about the new middle-class warriors with their cod philosophies and casual dismissal of democratic channels. The Occupy protesters outside St Paul's Cathedral in London named their camp "Tahrir Square" while they sat cross-legged, sang songs and consumed Marks & Spencer sandwiches, oblivious to the obscenity of a comparison with freedom fighters who risked their lives in Egypt.

I feel almost sick when reading that. I was proud to be a small part of Occupy by taking part in some of its sessions. I was proud it when it adopted tax justice as a major demand. I was proud when that pressure - from Occupy and UK Uncut backed by data from people like me - forced David Cameron to put tax on the international agenda. I was pleased he took the issue to the G8, even if the outcome was far from all I wanted.

None of that change in Tory thinking would have happened without protest; not one bit of it. We challenged the world in our different ways, highlighting a massive cause of global social injustice, and we've changed the world just a bit as a result; probably rather more than Nick Herbert ever will.

I am revolted that he says we ignored democracy: no, we engaged with it.

I'm disgusted that he says our concern for social justice is 'cod philosophy'. No, it's mass concern for social justice and an end to exploitation.

My revulsion only increased when I read this that he wrote:

These were at least peaceful protesters, unlike others who have taken to the streets. The looters who carried armfuls of goods from shops during the London riots two summers ago displayed more greed than grievance. In Birmingham they even shot at

the police.

That he might dare to compare criminal rioting with the right to protest is beyond contempt. No one, anywhere that I know claimed that events in Birmingham, were political. And yet Herbert seeks to imply that those who engage in campaigning would condone shooting the police.

After which he says we should give up our causes and engage with 'democratic channels'. That, sadly, is denied to many. When most in this country despair that the 'democratic channels' he espouses deny them choice because there is one neoliberal agenda on offer - and I hear this, albeit expressed in many different ways, time after time again - what Herbert's actually saying is that we should not confront the power of the elite in which he has a comfortable role.

The unsurprising result of this attitude is the [Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill](#) which [as even the FT notes today](#), will massively restrict freedom of speech in this country, and no doubt deliberately so. In which case it is ironic that Herbert concludes his piece with the claim that:

King's heirs are not the pygmy protesters who move from one fashionable campsite and cause to another. They are those who fight courageously for human rights that are still denied across the world. Let freedom ring for them.

It is he who is seeking to restrict human rights.

It is he who is seeking to remove union rights.

It is the companies and the City of London who funds his party that are fleecing Africa - as we, as protestors, have proved.

It is he who lacks courage by removing our right to speak.

It is we who protest who have the courage to speak out against the abuse of power in the name of democracy that is happening on our country today.

And we will continue to do so, Precisely because there are people like Nick Herbert.