

Introducing the DSEi NVDA Training Collective

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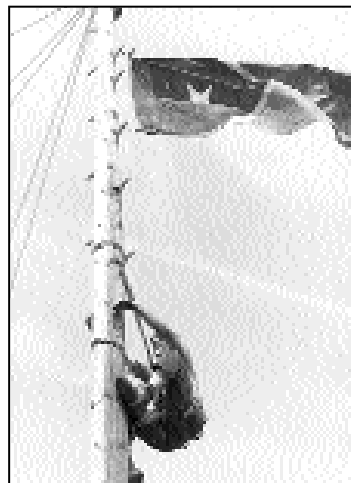
● David Babbs

Plans for protest at DSEi this year are large-scale and thorough. Training and skills share provision for activists taking part in the protests is similarly ambitious, with a sizeable collective of NonViolent Direct Action (NVDA) trainers offering a programme of workshops both before and during the event.

This article explains who these trainers are, what we're planning to offer, and why we hope that we'll be making a useful contribution to efforts to Disarm DSEi.

Who are the DSEi NVDA TC? The DSEi NVDA Training Collective is a diverse bunch, bringing together people with a wide variety of campaigning perspectives, from Quakers to anarchists, CND to the grass-roots direct action anti-roads movement – and from none of the above.

What unifies us is our desire to work with anyone considering taking action at DSEi. Diversity is our strength – between us we have such a breadth of experiences and approaches that we should, we hope, be able to cater for anyone.



Activist climbs and flies East Timor flag at BAe factory. PHOTO: JULIA GUEST

What's on offer?

The workshops on offer, and the skills we'll be hoping to share, will be diverse, but all will be characterised by the same basic aims:

- **Demystification of nonviolent direct action:** We'll try to cut through the myths and the activist jargon which can surround NVDA, and give participants who are new to it a more accurate idea of what taking action might involve in practice.
- **Exploration of people's individual approaches to NVDA:** We'll explore people's individual feelings

about violence, and try to address their fears and concerns.

● **Empowerment of individuals and groups:** We want to help people take the action they want to take, through the sharing of practical ideas and skills.

We'll be offering exercises on de-escalating potentially violent situations, safe and effective passive resistance, coping with arrest and taking quick and democratic group decisions. We'll work through people's worries about taking action, and help them identify the support systems they need to feel safe.

Why bother?

That all sounds very worthy, a sceptic might say, but are there not more pressing things to worry about before an arms fair? Why waste your time doing role plays and exploring the value of legal observers when there are maps to pore over, costumes to sew, D-locks to oil?

We disagree – we think training and skill sharing has an important role to play in the preparation for any direct action, and in any movement that hopes to have a long-term positive impact on the world. Here are a few of our favourite reasons why:

- Training empowers more people to take action.
- Training spreads ideas and gives new individuals and groups the ideas, skills and confidence to take action. By providing practical information on what NVDA involves, and offering a safe space for people to ask questions and work through their concerns, training can also make our movement more accessible, and widen participation beyond veteran activists. This is surely an intrinsically desirable thing for a movement that wants to be open and democratic, but it is also a practical necessity – if we really want to change society for the better, we need a lot more people involved.

● Training means safer, better supported actions

Effective NVDA isn't just about "front-line" activists, but also all those people in support roles, as legal observer, first-aiders, police liaison, etc. Training helps groups identify their support needs, and makes clear the value of support roles. Training can also prepare people to carry out these roles, and ensure everyone in a group has a shared understanding of their responsibilities.

Training is anti-hierarchical

At the same time as helping our movement to grow, training reduces its dependence on a small pool of leaders/experienced campaigners. Far from being elitist, training delivered with a commitment to openness is in fact anti-hierarchical – its aim is to give everyone the skills they want.

Effective teamwork

Training provides a space for affinity groups to practise working together prior to an action - exploring their problems, practising taking decisions together, and working through any difficulties they identify.

Training helps us all explore what NVDA means.

One of the novelties of this year's DSEi protests is the fact that a whole day is devoted explicitly to NVDA. Yet both "nonviolence" and "direct action" are slippery concepts, with a tendency to mean very different things to different people. We need to all be able to work together, to understand and respect different perspectives, and help those individuals new to NVDA to explore their own position. Training provides a goal-oriented context in which to do this – hopefully making the NVDA day one on which everyone feels safe and trusts those around them.

Part of the solution

DSEi, along with many other nasty events that perpetuate militarism and violence, needs to be stopped. The NVDA Training Collective hopes to help empower as many people as possible to do this necessary job in a way that is democratic, safe and enjoyable for everyone.

The NVDA workshop programme at DSEi

● NVDA trainings will take place daily between 5 and 10 September at Trinity Methodist Centre, 119 East India Dock Road, Poplar, London E14 (All Saints DLR).

Also on

- Sunday 7 September 12-1.30pm at the Disarm DSEi Counter Conference, Kingsley Hall, Powis Road, Bromley by Bow, London, E3 (Bromley by Bow Underground, Devons Road or Bow Road DLR);
- Sunday 7 September 1-4pm at St Annes Church, Berwick Road, Canning Town, London E16 (Prince Regent DLR).

For more info about the DSEi NVDA Training Collective, to request training, or to offer to help run some: c/o 16b Cherwell Street Oxford OX4 1BG, Britain (UKM 07796 430 141; email holly@gn.apc.org).

David Babbs is a member of the training collective.

