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# YOUNG PEOPLE CONDEMN DISPERSAL ORDERS

In the last issue of WPJN, we reported on the use of Dispersal Orders by the police to break up groups of two or more teenagers not committing any crimes. The two Dispersal Orders which had been in force in Wrexham villages had expired, the perceived problems have re-occurred, and a new Order has now been made, covering two villages close to where I live: Brynteg and Southsea.

This is how the Wrexham Mail reported the story: *"Police are to use a dispersal order for the second time in Brynteg and Southsea in a bid to clamp down on anti-social behaviour... Nuisance youths have once again begun to gather in large groups, particularly by the shops in Darby Road, and this has resulted in numerous complaints from both businesses and the community. Issues have been raised concerning intimidation, noise nuisance, litter, graffiti and minor disturbances."*

Note how the word "nuisance" has been attached as an adjective to "youths". There is no hint of any concern to discover why youths might be causing nuisance in their villages. They are "nuisance youths" and as such they have to be disposed of. Not a moment's thought is given to what might happen to these youths once they have been 'dispersed'. If Dispersal Orders are so wonderful, why has this problem come back again? Are we going to have to have Dispersal Orders in force everywhere all the time, and if so, at what cost to our young people's human right to meet up with their friends? There is a youth club in Brynteg two nights a week. On another night, young people can go to the Community House on Darby Road. The rest of the time there is nothing for them to do. There is a skate park but it's not much fun when it's dark and cold. Small wonder they hang round by the shops.

I visited Brynteg at 8.30pm on a Saturday night to find out how local young people felt about the Dispersal Orders. Where better to go than the Darby Road shopping parade? A group of perhaps eight or nine youngsters, probably all under 16, were standing outside the 'open all hours' shop chatting when I arrived. I asked them if they knew about Dispersal Orders.

They did, and they all spoke indignantly about how they were moved on by the Police if they stayed near the shop after 9pm. They also complained bitterly that this was happening even when they were with just one other friend. According to the young people, the police strategy is to approach a group, demand that it disperses, and if anyone argues or objects, they then arrest the oldest members of the group and scatter the younger members. Some mentioned children who had been escorted home by the police, although it wasn't clear whether this had taken place (illegally) under the successfully challenged Dispersal Order provisions or under welfare legislation.

Not wanting to face constant harassment, the young people had developed strategies to avoid being 'dispersed'. One girl told me that she now often walks over to Gwersyllt to hang round with her mates by the shops there. The only way to get from Brynteg to Gwersyllt on foot is through the unlit and sparsely populated Moss Valley, hardly a safe journey for a young girl after dark. Others explained how they stayed by the shop until nearly 9pm, and then moved on to quieter (and presumably darker) areas where they wouldn't be noticed. And of course, if there is going to be any trouble, it just happens elsewhere. This is an extract from a recent letter to the *Hackney Gazette* concerning a Dispersal Order on the Pembury estate:

*"Since it came into force, there has been a dramatic rise in harmful behaviour (eg. racist harassment, threats of violence, damage to vehicles and community gardens) on our estates, which lie just outside the zone. Could it be that in giving themselves the power to 'move on' presumed 'trouble-makers', the police are simply moving the problem elsewhere? It's like having a leaky pipe in your kitchen and redirecting it into your living room instead of fixing it."*

Janine Booth, Chairperson, Aspland & Marcon Estates Tenants' & Residents' Association.

Well said, Janine. I couldn't have put it better.

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# NEW GROUP SET UP TO CHALLENGE ID CARDS

Worried about ID cards? You should be! ID cards will not be "voluntary" for long; very soon they will become compulsory, unless we do something drastic to challenge their introduction. That means planning and working together to build an effective resistance campaign which will make the whole ID card scheme unworkable.

## Here are just a few of the things that are wrong with ID cards:

- You will have to pay for your ID card (current guess: nearly £100 and with estimates going up by the hour).
- You will have to pay again each time you need to change a detail on your card (if you move house for instance). This will penalise students and people with insecure housing, those least able to afford to pay.
- It will be your responsibility to check all information held on you is complete and up to date, but you'll have to pay to do such a check.
- If you fail to keep your card up to date, there are harsh penalties.
- The technology doesn't work - the biometric iris recognition system doesn't work on brown eyes, and the face recognition system doesn't work if you're bald. Government schemes involving computers NEVER work properly.
- Information about you will be accessible to all sorts of people, including unvetted agency workers.
- ID cards will do nothing to stop terrorism, nor will they prevent identity fraud.

If you're concerned about ID cards, join our e-group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WrexhamagainstID/>. We'll be planning meetings and actions in the New Year. Or contact Genny on 0845 330 4505 to find out what's happening and when.