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Exclusion zone will bar fuel protesters from London

BY JASON BENNETTO,
PAUL LASHMAR AND
CAROL MILMO

A HUGE exclusion zone is to be set up around London as part of a series of unprecedented security measures to prevent lorry drivers causing disruption during next week's fuel protest. Chief constables adopted a tough stance against the demonstrators yesterday, with plans to install police checkpoints on the outskirts of London, ban all protesters from Westminster and impose a minimum 50mph speed limit on motorway convoys.

Oil companies and the police have also installed fences and barriers to prevent protesters from gathering outside fuel depots for next Tuesday's protests. Any hauliers who try to block all lanes of the motorway or drive below 50mph will be pulled over. Those who refuse to abide by the police restrictions are likely to be arrested and could have their licences taken away by the courts.

The restrictions on the convoys were linked to measures applied in a "police state" by one leader of the anti-fuel-tax rally. But support for the protest appeared to be waning as Tony Blair stepped up the pressure, saying that he would not make any further concessions.

The convoys, 70 vehicles strong when it left Tyneside in the morning, had dwindled to fewer than 50 by the time it stopped for the night north of Leeds. One vehicle was removed from the road by officers because it was deemed to be travelling too slowly. Bryan Williams, a leader of the original protests, called for the convoys to be abandoned.

Scotland Yard unveiled details of three exclusion zones stretching as far as the M25 or M1 motorway - 17 miles from



Fuel protesters gathering at the Birtley Truck Stop to begin their convoy from Tyneside to London yesterday

the centre of London. In the first, police checkpoints will stop all lorries and protest vehicles unless the drivers have documentary evidence that they are carrying out normal business. Vehicles stopped by the police will be kept at emergency lorry parks close to the M25 and the protesters will have to take public transport to the rally at Hyde Park in central London. Scotland Yard drivers will be on standby to confiscate vehicles if hauliers refuse to co-operate.

A second exclusion zone to tackle vehicles already inside the M25 will operate in London between Bletchley, Vauxhall, Paddington and King's Cross. Police checkpoints will stop any protest lorries longer than 40ft from entering. All lorries and protesters, even those on foot, will be banned from the third zone - known as the "Sessional Area" - which covers Parliament, Downing Street, St James's Park, and Green Park. Thousands of people are expected to gather at Hyde Park

for Tuesday's rally to demand tax cuts in fuel duty before marching to Battersea Park. Outlining his strategy, Sir John Stevens, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, said that measures were being taken to prevent protesters from causing disruption. He said that the protest could be exploited by dissident republican terrorists who may be mounting a bombing campaign.

Tony Burden, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, insisted that there had been no interference from

the Government when asked about what had prompted the tougher stance. After the September blockade, the police had reassessed their position and believed using slow-moving convoys was a "very dangerous tactic" not to be tolerated.

But Andrew Spence, leader of the People's Fuel Lobby, said: "If that is the way the police want to do it, they can, but this is another nail in the coffin of the police state."

Action is also being taken to forestall blockades at oil

terminals. At Purfleet, in Essex, the main gates have been moved closer to the road to make it harder for anyone seeking to mount a blockade. "No waiting" cones have been placed along the road in front of the depot and through the day police cars patrolled regularly. At the BP refinery at Stanlow, Cheshire, the scene of the original protest, new fencing has gone up to prevent large gatherings outside the site.

Hidden cost of the freight trade, page 3

Two men and a game of poker for history

IT HAS come down to this. The struggle for the US presidency is now a cross between a game of poker and a game of chicken - the domestic political equivalent of the Cuban missile crisis in which the stakes are the highest imaginable: the world's most powerful elective office.

It is an utterly compelling spectacle, played out in the ballroom and courts of Florida, and, later, perhaps, in the fine print of the US constitution.

Ultimately however - and most gripping of all - this election will not be decided by the law, nor even by the constitution, but by two human beings, only one of whom can win. The US constitution is a majestic arbiter, but it takes people to make constitutions work. A week after the desperately close 1960 election, Richard Nixon met John F. Kennedy to assure him the result would not be challenged.

Sooner or later, surely, something similar will happen. Maybe neither will back down and the conflict will reach the Supreme Court. But either Al Gore or George W. Bush will have to give up his claim to be the 43rd President. There will be no consolation prize, apart from a place in history as the man who did the decent thing and perhaps saved the American system.

But no hero for posterity was volunteering yesterday. "We want the true and accurate will of the people to prevail, and that means letting the legal system run its course," proclaimed William Daley, Mr Gore's campaign manager. To which Jim Baker, Mr Bush's man in Florida, retorted with threats of his own. "Let the country step back and pause and think what's at stake here. This may be the last chance to do that. There's no reasonable end to this process if it slips away."

In fact, the system is working. The problem is America's all-pervasive impatience, the lust to know everything instantly. "One is enough," Churchill famously said of majorities, and we are getting close to that now. Not only in the presidential contest, but in the Senate and the House of Representatives, this election has been excruciatingly close.

The revised Bush majority in Florida is 327, equal to 1,000 per cent of the vote in the state - although absentee ballots are likely to enlarge it. But Florida is not the end of the matter. The outcome in Iowa, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Wisconsin were waffler tries: why not recount there? And if the courts in Florida are to be involved, why not elsewhere where the results are close and someone has a complaint to register, an axe to grind? Thus Mr Baker's warn-



RUPERT CORNWELL

ing yesterday: a legal fight in Florida (where an election has never been voided) would open a Pandora's box.

And among the great and the good (including The Washington Post, which endorsed Mr Gore) an informal consensus is emerging: let the Florida recount run its course, until Friday when all absentee votes are counted. Then whoever is ahead wins. Sure, the Palm Beach county ballot paper was not a masterpiece of design clarity, but it was approved by both parties beforehand, and nobody is suggesting fraud.

The only snag is, America has a long history of army judges taking history into their hands. And if one does, and the process runs all the way to the Supreme Court, the use of the legal process for political ends - so visible in the Clinton impeachment - would be complete. If the warnings that America is on the edge of a constitutional precipice have any meaning, it is that.

Meanwhile, both sides play with public relations fire. Mr Bush exudes arrogance, behaving as if the election were already won. Mr Gore is near to appearing a bad loser. History may be in the making, but neither campaign is showing much sense of it.

However, let us not lament absent statesmanship, but boast on the twists - there have been the most exciting US elections: a presidential one where the leader of one candidate governs the state on which everything depends; a senate race won by a dead man, and - delicious irony - the son of Richard J. Daley, whose chicanery in Chicago helped JFK win 40 years ago, lecturing on the purity of democracy.

In the end though, even after a week that shook America, the edifice is still standing. For all the lurid and unnerving headlines, the US is an immensely stable country. "This is the most nervous moment of my life," said George Bush senior, "but democracy will go on." And it will. But how? Propelled by lawyers or by politicians?

Further reports, pages 3-7.
Leading article, Review, page 8.
Monitor, Review, page 8.

Rock on! Ann Widdecombe, scourge of drugs, bags Shaun Ryder's ex-manager

BY MARIE WOOLF
Chief Political Correspondent

ANN WIDDECOMBE, the shadow Home Secretary, has hired a former manager of a one-time drug-addicted rock star to take on a new role - as her new House of Commons assistant. The Tory MP's new secretary, Gloria Nicholl, who starts next week, used to manage Shaun Ryder, a former registered drug addict who fronted the successful Manchester band the Happy Mondays and Black Grape. Miss Widdecombe, who famously advocated a zero tolerance policy



Gloria Nicholl, left, and her boss Ann Widdecombe. Towards cannabis was unaware that Mrs Nicholl's former client was a drug addict who fronted the successful Manchester band the Happy Mondays and Black Grape. Miss Widdecombe, who famously advocated a zero tolerance policy

and dealing with people at all levels. She is a good Catholic. She has experience in the Catholic Church and is used to dealing with people's problems."

Mrs Nicholl, who with her husband, William, formed half of the music management duo Nicholl and Dime, was a £100,000 court case against the Happy Mondays' frontman for unpaid commission last year. Evidence was given that Ryder was known in the music industry for "abusing drugs" and did not fully understand his contract with the Nicholls, who revived his fortunes with Black Grape.

Miss Widdecombe's current secretary is leaving the House of Commons to have a baby. Leading article, Review, page 3.

THE INDEPENDENT

Highest sales for three years

THE INDEPENDENT has recorded its highest monthly circulation figures for three years. Audited figures for October, released yesterday, show The Independent's daily sale has risen to 240,273, the highest level since November 1997.

The October figure also represents a rise of 4.3 per cent on the previous month and an increase of 4.2 per cent on the same period last year. The Independent is alone among national broadsheet newspapers in registering month-on-month and year-on-year increases. The paper's share of the broadsheet market is at 16.5 per cent, also the highest for three years.

The figures show the progress made since its disposal. News and Media took control of the titles in March 1998. We are delighted that the continuing investment in the papers is being reflected in rising circulation and highly encouraging readership figures.

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