

Opposing direct action

Introductory note by Francis Bennion

Ideas prosper only through the flawed men and women who champion them, wrote John Campbell in his book *Pistols at Dawn: Two Hundred Years of Political Rivalry* (Jonathan Cape, 2009). The flawed Peter Hain championed the idea of direct action by employing it when leading opposition to South African sporting tours in the 1970s. Direct action is contrary to the rule of law and I have done what I could to combat it. The latest is the letter reproduced below. (It was the lead letter and I have reproduced the headings given by the *Observer*.) Other instances will be found on this website as follows:

For more of FB's articles about direct action see

www.francisbennion.com/topic/directaction.htm.

Letter in *The Observer*, *Review*

Long live the ballot

Tyranny of the few

In his review of *The Life and Death of Democracy* by John Keane (7 June 2009) David Runciman says citizens now have to scrutinise, complain about and resist their representative governments, not just through parliaments, but also through watchdogs, audits, regional assemblies, civil society monitors and so on. Thankfully he does not add direct action. No doubt he realises this is undemocratic, as well as being contrary to the rule of law.

My blood ran cold when reading on the letters page Barry Lowman's sneering reference to what he calls "ballot-box politics" – in other words parliamentary democracy. This he contrasts with direct action like that of the Greenpeace Six in forcibly shutting down a power station. He calls that daring, brave, thoughtful and timely. It was also illegal. Furthermore it was tyrannical because by criminal means it inflicted on the majority forcible action powered by the will of a small self-selected group.

Francis Bennion

Observer Review, 14 June 2009.