

Could the Gagging Bill be the tipping point where peopl...

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The Gagging Bill on the UK's charity and NGO sector [was 'paused' in the House of Lords on Monday](#) to avoid an almost inevitable defeat that would have otherwise occurred. As one of those who yelled long and hard about the chilling impact the Bill would have on freedom of speech in this country I am pleased.

But it is only a pause. And we had one of those on the health and Social Care Bill and the NHS was then still privatised despite that pause. So we cannot take much comfort from the delay, and it is very short, of just five weeks.

Is that long enough to consider the incredibly valuable work done by the [Commission on Civil Society and Democratic Engagement](#) that has reviewed this Bill? In the foreword Richard Harries says:

There is no doubt, from the evidence that this Commission has gathered, that Part 2 of the Lobbying Bill risks profoundly undermining the very fabric of our democracy by significantly limiting the right of organisations — from charities and community groups to think tanks and blog sites — to speak out on some of the most important issues facing this country and the planet. Whether we agree with these organisations or not, their role is essential in order to have an informed, engaged electorate.

And then you wonder why Russell Brand might think politicians have lost it? As [Zoe Williams puts it in the Guardian this morning](#):

[An idea] has come to fixate the Commons — the idea that "other political or campaigning organisations ... are competing with parties for members" ([House of Commons Library, 2012](#)). Is the National Trust seriously drawing away the Tory hardcore? Or is it possible that many people, beyond [Russell Brand](#), think that if a conventional politician is the answer, you have asked a really weird question? Do people need some other outlet for their civic spirit and sense of exuberant possibility?

Rather than asking these questions, politicians have determined that they can stave off this threat to their power by bringing down the third sector. Hubris combined with — in the kindest possible light — not giving themselves enough thinking time has resulted in

a suggestion that, were charities sincerely to mobilise their supporters against it, it would fuel the closest thing we've seen to a revolution since 1651.

She may just be right. Trying to achieve this goal of shutting up everyone whose opinion is of any worth in the country so that politicians can have unencumbered reign may just create the tipping point [for that revolution of the spirit that I think Brand eludes to](#). Neoliberal politics is all about control by the few. Pushing on with this Bill in five weeks could create the tipping point where people say no to that. It would make 2014 a very interesting year if they tried, not least because I think mass civil disobedience - in the form of blogging - would follow.

[Jersey may try to imprison its bloggers](#). Trying to do so in the UK may be a lot harder.