

## Being seriously annoying is soon going to be punishable...

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Sometimes someone else summarises an issue better than you can. This is [the Good LawProject](#) writing about Priti Patel's new [Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill 2021](#). As they note:

*The Home Secretary, in particular, doesn't seem to like dissenting voices — nor does she want to engage with the root causes of these protests, preferring instead to brand protesters "[so-called eco-crusaders turned criminals](#)" and to accuse them of "[hooliganism and thuggery](#)".*

The Government's proposed solution? To clamp down hard on the right to protest. The Bill as it stands would give sweeping new powers to the police to restrict peaceful protests — including by giving them the powers to set conditions on the duration of protests, set maximum noise levels, and put restrictions on where protests can take place. As it seems to us, the very purpose of the right to protest is to enable people to register their profound unhappiness or strength of feeling in a way which compels the State to respond. To legislate so that right cannot have any impact is to legislate it out of meaningful existence.

The disproportionate measures proposed in the Bill also risk undermining the freedom of assembly and association protected under the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act.

Will the government worry about such a breach? Hardly: breaching human rights is its aim.

Undermining democratic freedoms is also its aim.

And finding flimsy foundations for prosecution is another. Under the terms of the proposed Act causing 'serious annoyance' to another person can be punishable by up to ten years in prison. Look at section 59 if you doubt me.

This is not about justice. Nor is it about protecting anyone. This is about suppressing those organisations like Extinction Rebellion and Black Lives Matter who are seeking to

change our country, for the better. This could also, of course, be used against otherwise legal picketing.

This is not the work of a government seeking to provide the appropriate checks and balances that are essential to a functioning democracy. This is the work of a government that wishes to outlaw protest, which by its very nature is an expression of serious annoyance at the action of others who will, also by its very nature, be seriously annoyed as a result. By definition this makes protest very difficult, if not impossible as a consequence. It will always be possible to find someone who will say they have been annoyed by it. Ten years in prison then follows.

This is the work of a fascist state. I would like to describe it otherwise. I do not think that possible. When a state has the right to have someone imprisoned for being seriously annoying a line had been crossed. We will have crossed it if the Act becomes law, as no doubt and inevitably, it will.