

The state we are in

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We have just witnessed a traumatic weekend. Women who, quite appropriately, wished to pay their respects to a woman killed for simply walking on a London street were deemed by the Metropolitan Police to be partaking in a criminal act for doing so. Amongst the criminals was the Duchess of Cambridge.

She, and so many other people, very largely women, committed what would have been a legal act until the Met decided it was not. A prior court case determined that.

And then the Met used violence against women protesting about violence to supposedly uphold Covid regulations by deliberately breaching those regulations, putting significant numbers of people at increased risk as a consequence, including their own officers.

At every possible level, from deciding not to cooperate with an event that was clearly going to happen when a Court gave them the legal option to do so onward, the Met got this wrong.

And then the Met Commissioner suggested that anyone in the comfort of their arm chair who decided to criticise police officers had this wrong. Only, she made clear, police officers could decide what was right or wrong. They are beyond judgement by anyone else was the clear implication of what she had to say.

She is wrong of course. And it is because of that justification for the errors that were made that she has to go. What she has done is fallen for the prevailing populist narrative where what is right is not what is objectively true, but is instead what justifies the action taken.

This is, of course, the line of Trump, and Johnson. With the former gone, let's concentrate on the latter. No one has the slightest belief that Johnson will tell the truth now. He has himself given up the pretence that he will. He is as a result the first prime minister who turns up at the Commons to answer questions not caring what they might be because he knows he will lie, come what may, and claim the answer is true just for so long as it serves his purpose to do so, when another lie will replace the one

previously uttered.

Cressida Dick offered the same type of argument. She claimed, for example, that she would have gone to the vigil if it had been legal, ignoring the fact that it was only illegal because she decided it was not.

And she claimed that the vigil was not a vigil at all, but a protest. But that was only true because she decided to relabel what was very clearly a vigil, albeit a justifiably angry one, as something else.

Then she claimed police action was necessary when very clearly it was not. The safest course of action was to simply let people disperse, as they naturally would have done on a cold March evening.

And she said that the rest of us could not judge. You had to be there, she said. Except she wasn't. So by her own standard, her comment was objectively wrong, but she made it anyway.

The claims made are all true, in her view. Except objectively it is clear that they are not. Each is a justification for taking unnecessary action. Unless, that is it was pre-determined to be necessary to defend an arrogant, misogynist police force feeling hurt and wronged because of its own failing in recruiting the officer now accused of the crime with regard to the consequence of which the vigil was being held.

~~And maybe it was also pre-determined to~~
support today's parliamentary hearing on a Bill extending police power. That Bill gives police the right to charge people for being annoying. And it gives them the right to charge people for events they cannot control, including how many people might turn up to a vigil.

In other words, what it provides is the opportunity to find a person guilty of offending the subjective perception of a police officer as to what is right or wrong. And this in a world where populism has made subjective perception the determinant of right and wrong, with any attempt to understand the position of the person who does not agree with you having long since been abandoned, as has been made very clear, once again, by the actions of Boris Johnson.

Saturday was a foretaste of what is to come. It showed that we are heading for a situation where we can do whatever it is that a police officer thinks we might do. There will be no objective appeal. The proposed law makes the opinion of an officer the test of truth that must be met, and the opinion of an annoyed person the determinant of guilt, without saying that this in itself makes annoying a police officer a crime, which it clearly does.

This weekend we saw the state we have become.

A police state.

A state where the rule of law is replaced by the rule of the police officers' interpretation of the law.

A state where truth does not exist, and self justifying representation is what replaces it.

A place where the legal and human right to congregate is to be suspended, in perpetuity.

A state where the right to hold an opinion, to express fear, to grieve, and to seek comfort from others suffering the same concern is to become illegal.

That is where we are.

And you wonder why I think we live in a fascist state?

And that I live with increasing fear?

What is to become of us?