

First they came for Steve Bray

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There is a small, but worrying, groundswell of opinion developing at present that suggests that the whole of the government's anti-protest legislation is simply an attack on the activities of Steve Bray, who has been a persistent nuisance to the government with his one-man campaign against Brexit and Tory abuse since 2016. Standing outside parliament and broadcasting with powerful amps, he has undoubtedly been deeply annoying. There can be no surprise that Steve has been the target of the first police action since they gained new powers on Tuesday this week:

https://twitter.com/snb19692/status/1542082751423209473?s=20&t=bepLDFF8n6PH9t0fcdu_ZQ

However, to pretend that Steve was the sole focus of this legislation that seeks to control protest is very dangerous. He clearly was not. This government is stupid, but not that stupid. And what they know is that if they can secure their case by making an example of someone, especially someone as divisive as Steve Bray, then the resulting powers that they can give themselves can be used against others. To pretend otherwise is to deny that the whole motivation for this new legislation is fascist.

The motivation for the crackdown on protest is not Steve Bray. The motivation is to stop the women peacefully protesting about the death of Sarah Everard. And to stop Extinction Rebellion. Trade unions are also, of course, inevitably, a target. Any picket line could now be subject to police action under these new powers, even if legal under trade union law. And don't doubt there will be political uses as well. I wonder how many protests in favour of Scottish independence might be banned using these new laws?

Steve Bray is annoying. That's why he is successful. But let's not for a moment pretend that he is the sole focus of legislation. It's a denial of political reality to suggest that he is. Fascism is not that selective. First, they come for one individual or group, but it never stops there.