

First they came

Published: January 13, 2026, 10:48 am

Steve Pottinger is a poet whose work I have admired and bought for a long time.

The poem of his that is reproduced below was written this week. As Steve said of it in an email:

Early this week – on Monday, to be precise – I found myself writing another poem. The starting point for this one was the horrific footage of a young Palestinian man, Sha'aban Al-Dalou, burning alive in his hospital bed after an Israeli airstrike. It led me to consider the failure of so many politicians and so much of our media to take any kind of stance in opposition to an ongoing genocide, and that – in turn – led me to write.

My thanks to both CultureMatters and Yorkshire Bylines for publishing the poem. Platforms for political poetry are few and far between, and I'm very grateful for what they do. If you've the time to click on the links to their respective webpages.

Steve's own site is here.

This is the poem:

First they came for the hospitals
and you did not speak out
except to say they wouldn't, and anyway, tunnels.
Then they came for five-year-old blind
and you did not speak out
except to say, regrettable, but anyway, hostages.
Then they came for journalists, professors, poets,
and you did not speak out
except to say, awful, but right to self-defence.
They came for schools, for mosques, aid workers;
anyone in the sights of a sniper
and you did not speak out
except to say, yeah, but most moral army
now they come for starving people in tents
and burn them, and you do not speak out
you do not speak out
you never speak out.

When they come for you
expect nothing but silence.

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I did, of course, get Steve's permission to reproduce it here.