

Protest is how change happens

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Those with power rarely give it up willingly. That's why protest matters. It's how we won workers' rights, women's rights, gay rights, and have fought inequality in so many forms. But today, new laws are making protest harder in the UK. It's time to be louder.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUB0TLaos3k&si=_BSmdbknEagAP0BE

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=fzv6g-18f5336-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

This week has been a bad week for everybody who believes in the right to protest, and I do believe in the right to protest.

I do so for one very good and very simple reason.

Change has never happened by itself.

Change has always needed to be demanded, and almost always, protest has been part of creating the environment in which change can take place.

Those with power rarely want to give it up willingly, and that's why protest matters.

Protest has changed things.

It ended slavery in this country and eventually around the world in various ways.

Votes for working men and then women happened because of protest, sometimes decidedly rowdy and even violent on occasions, which people would like to forget now, particularly modern politicians, but they shouldn't.

Workers' rights and unions happened because of protests.

Women's rights were created by protest.

Apartheid was challenged by protest.

Climate strikes have an impact.

Gay rights, anti-prejudice laws, and so much else. All of this was created by protest.

Protest is not a privilege; let's be clear about this, protest is a right protected under international law. The UN Declaration of Human Rights, which the UK helped draft and which was adopted by around 70 countries in 1948, and now by the signatories to the UN as a whole, recognises that there is a right to freedom of opinion and expression.

That's in Article 19 of that declaration, and Article 20 gives a right to the freedom of peaceful assembly and association.

In other words, we have a right to our opinion, we have a right to say it in whatever way we wish, and we have a right to assemble together and tell the world that we are unhappy.

These are internationally respected human rights, but they're also part of UK law. The European Convention on Human Rights, obviously based upon the UN Declaration, was signed in 1950, and it eventually made its way into UK law after considerable hesitation on the part of Conservative governments from 1979 to 1997, in 1998.

It was a Labour government that enacted our human rights laws, and the Human Rights Act gives us the right to freedom of expression, and a right of free assembly and association.

In other words, those rights that we got in international law in 1948 were enshrined in UK law in 1998.

We have a right to protest, but this is now being challenged around the globe and in the UK.

We now need police consent to protest.

We are not allowed to make too much noise, and if we do, we can be arrested.

We are apparently only allowed to protest so long as we don't upset anybody, but that's the whole point of protest; without upsetting someone, nothing has ever changed.

New laws make it hard to march, strike or even gather. Just walking slowly down the road can be an offence now.

Those in power are living in fear of protest because they know it works. This protest requires that noise be made. Noise in all sorts of forms. In writing, in public, on video, and in the media, and it should be noticed because the fact that we need to protest is because issues are being hidden. Hidden by our media in far too many cases and without protest, injustice therefore continues.

So, without protest, there is no pressure on those in power to act, and this is an essential part of democracy.

Democracy is not just about voting every few years. It's about empowering citizens to hold power to account. And protest is one of the highest forms of democratic participation there is, because it asks the question, 'What are you going to do about this, which is wrong?'

We have the right to ask that question.

When parliament is challenging, that when it is trying to treat people as being outside the law because they're asking reasonable questions, then there's something wrong with our democracy.

We need to protest, because we need change.

There has never been a major advance without protest.

We must defend the right to speak out.

We must demand better, and in the last week, all these rights have gone backwards.

So we might need to be noisier still in the future.

Taking further action

If you want to write a letter to your MP on the issues raised in this blog post, there is a ChatGPT prompt to assist you in doing so, with full instructions, [here](#).