

What will ministers do?

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The port of Dover [was shut yesterday morning](#) by protesters, all of whom appeared to be male, all of whom were wearing black, and all of whom appeared to be wearing balaclavas.

The event appeared to be heavily supported by the so-called Tommy Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon. On social media, he encouraged attendance.

Despite this, the police described it as a spontaneous event. And although considerable disruption was created, and the stated goal was to disrupt flows through the port, as well as to cause harm to any migrant who might have arrived in the country whilst the protest was taking place, there were no arrests by the police even though, according to reports, the port authorities described it as a “public order incident.”

That, I think, was incorrect. This was a deliberate attempt to intimidate. The intimidation was aimed at the people of Dover, those who wished to travel through the port, the port authorities undertaking their legal obligations, and, of course, those who might arrive in the UK in a way that these people choose to call illegal, but which is not under international law. There was also, then, an attempt to intimidate those who might assist them at sea, as well as the government itself.

This moved this action beyond the boundaries of protest, the right to which I support, into something much more sinister. The uniform, long associated with terrorism, was not an accident. Nor was it by chance that almost everyone who attended wore it. The message was that this was a coordinated act by a force under a common command, with a singular purpose: to get its way.

That the protest did not last the three days that they claimed it would is neither here nor there. The message was delivered. The headlines were made. Disruption was created. I rather strongly suspect that further action will be seen in due course. Things like this are rarely singular events.

So what are our authorities going to do? It would seem at present that they just stood

by and let these people, whose behaviour accorded with none of those usually associated with protest or the right to express opinion, block traffic and disrupt the lives of people in a way that is entirely different from those who have, for example, walked peacefully to protest about climate change.

It also contrasts, most markedly, with those who have protested about genocide in Israel, many of whom are now labelled as terrorists and are subject to a denial of justice by our state, which has deemed that the holding of a piece of paper, or cardboard, can constitute a terrorist act when, apparently, assembling a uniformed force at a port is just a spontaneous event, even when a well-known provocateur encourages participation.

I stress, it is not my desire to deny those on the right wing of politics the right to protest. If I wish that for those on the left, I am quite sure that others are entitled to it as well. But this did not feel like a protest. This felt like a deliberate act of intimidation. The absence of the usual signs of protest, from banners and identification to, these days, prior notification of intent, suggests that this was something quite different. In that case, reasonable questions must be asked.

Will this organisation be proscribed? It would appear to have crossed the usual boundaries for being so.

Will the leaders of this event be made accountable for their actions?

Will the wearing of uniforms of the sort seen, using the word uniform in its literal sense, be proscribed?

I am clear that, in the interests of protecting everyone's right to protest, care will have to be taken in deciding what action is appropriate, but action necessary to prevent intimidation appears essential, and excuses by ministers will not do. I am expecting them, nonetheless.