



Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill

House of Commons, March 16, 2021

Speech by James Murray MP (Ealing North) (Lab/Co-op)

The need to protect women and girls from violence and the importance of protecting our fundamental right to protest are both long-standing issues that have been brought into sharp focus by what has happened in recent days.

We should be using the Bill before us to put in place long overdue protections for women against violence, including domestic homicides, rape and street harassment. We should be doing something about the fact that fewer people are prosecuted and convicted for rape now than at any time since records began, at a time when the number of reported rapes is increasing. We should be tackling the misogynistic attitudes that underpin the abuse women face.

Those at the vigil for Sarah Everard in Clapham on Saturday, like my constituents who got in touch with me last year about what happened to Nicole Smallman and Bibaa Henry in Wembley, want us to change as a society. Like so many others who have spoken out for such a long time, they want us as MPs, and as men in particular, to listen and to act.

But rather than use the Bill as an opportunity to act in support of women demanding to be able to walk the streets without fear, it is instead being used to attack our fundamental rights as citizens by limiting the right to protest. Those assembled on Saturday were part of a vigil, yet they have drawn attention to the Government's plans to restrict our right to protest with this Bill.

Protest is the foundation of our democracy. Like many Members of Parliament, I have protested outside of this place for far longer than I have been within it. The right to protest must be protected for us all, and I will use my position in here to do all that I can to defend it.

The attempt to restrict our right to protest is not a sign of a Government who are confident with the country that they seek to represent. The right to protest is a long and deeply held part of British democracy. The Bill's attempt to allow the police to restrict protest because of

“the noise generated by persons taking part” would make a mockery of our rights.

It is shameful that, rather than attack the injustices that people are protesting about, this Government seek to attack the very right to protest itself.

There are measures in the Bill that I and other Labour Members welcome, but the way it targets Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, fails to address violence against women and girls, and seeks to attack our right to protest mean that it is something that we must oppose.

As MPs we can use our votes today to voice our opposition to this Bill. It would be inexcusable to use those votes to silence the voices of protest outside.
