

Green Party protest urges Labour to oppose Policing Bill as it reaches House of Lords



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The Green Party has urged Labour to oppose the dictatorial powers within the Policing Bill as it reaches the House of Lords this week.

Green Party parliamentarians Caroline Lucas, Jenny Jones and Natalie Bennett and London Assembly member Zack Polanski will be joining a socially-distanced protest in Parliament Square on Wednesday 12 January to defend the right to protest [1].

Crucial votes have started on amendments this week to defend the right to effective protest, this will culminate in a decisive showdown with the government next Monday (17 January).

The Green Party is calling on Labour and independent members of the House of Lords to stand up for the right to take part in peaceful protest, which they say will be removed by the government's Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill.

The protest will be a Covid-safe event where those attending will be expected to socially distance and masks will also be available. [2]

Baroness Jenny Jones, who has been leading opposition to the Policing Bill in the House of Lords, said: "The Government is trying to take away our democratic freedom to protest, but in the next few days we have a unique opportunity to stop some of the worst measures outright in the Lords. Laws that give the police the power to stop people attending demonstrations who have no criminal conviction and to stop and search without suspicion.

"Boris Johnson once promised to lay down in front of the bulldozers if they expanded Heathrow, now he wants a year in jail for anyone doing that. We need

Labour and others to vote with us, in deleting these draconian laws from the Police Bill.”

Caroline Lucas MP said: “Priti Patel has said that she intends to use the Bill to criminalise people taking part in climate-related protests. But the sweeping powers of this Bill could be used against anyone who falls foul of what the home secretary decides is acceptable.

“The threat to democracy goes way beyond party politics, and we are calling on MPs of all parties and members of the House of Lords to stand up for human rights and reject this extremely dangerous and anti-democratic Bill. Whatever the home secretary believes, protest is a fundamental right in our democracy, not a crime. It must be protected.”

Baroness Natalie Bennett said: “Many of the rights we enjoy today would not have been achieved without protest, including women’s right to vote. The statue of Millicent Fawcett, where we will be gathering, commemorates the suffragists’ long struggle. Boris Johnson attended the unveiling of this statue in 2018, but his government is now planning to criminalise the very forms of protest used by these brave women.”

London Assembly member and Green Party spokesperson on Democracy and Citizenship, Zack Polanski AM, said: “The Policing Bill has been condemned by a wide range of civil rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Liberty. It clearly contradicts Article 11 of the Human Rights Act, which protects people’s right to protest by holding meetings and demonstrations. Even the Conservative MP David Davis has warned of the uses to which this dangerous legislation could be put.

“There is a clear distinction between peaceful protest and violent action – and there are plenty of laws already that can be used against anyone who crosses that line. The Green Party will always defend people’s right to peaceful protest, whether we agree with what they are saying or not.”

Baroness Jones said: “These draconian laws should be seen as part of the attack on our democracy designed to keep a corrupt government in power and minimise opposition.

“Ironically, it could be the government’s attempt to bypass parliamentary scrutiny by MPs that enables the Lords to defeat the 18 pages of new amendments that have been added to the Bill. If so, there is a good chance that the government will be forced to go back to the drawing board.”

Notes

1

The socially distanced protest starts at 10.15am in front of the statue of leading suffragist Millicent Fawcett where there will be speeches from Green Party representatives

2

Pictures will be available after the event.

Journalists wishing to attend the event or to arrange an interview with a Green Party representative should contact press@greenparty.org.uk or call 0203 691 9401

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