

## Theme : Protesting

### **Protesters have gone far enough, it's time to restore dignity to Parliament**

*Sky News*, by Adam Boulton, October 12, 2019

Views of Westminster from the bridges over the Thames have been celebrated by artists as varied as William Wordsworth, Claude Monet and The Kinks.

There's not much inspiration for any artist coming to parliament these days.

Big Ben is shrouded in scaffolding and dark drapes. The chimes and the clock are out of order.

Westminster Bridge is shut to traffic and strewn with barriers, cones and rarely used cycle lanes. The pavements are cluttered by a motley crew of con artists, illegal store holders and rickshaw drivers looking to separate the throngs of tourists from their cash.

Those who make it as far as Parliament Square have to do so on foot. That is currently the only way to reach the important buildings which surround it including parliament, Westminster Abbey, and the Supreme Court. To protect the few hundred Extinction Rebellion protesters camping out for two weeks the police have closed surrounding roads such as the Embankment, Victoria Street and Whitehall.

Thanks to recent terror attacks, the Palace of Westminster itself stands in a state of siege, protected by high fences and massive blast proof barricades.

Outside, other protesters drift about with their hats, flags, banners and amplification systems. The majority of them are either for or against Brexit but there are a number of other eccentrics who seem to have little to do with the political issues of the day. Glockenspiel Man comes along to play loudly on evenings when live cameras are around. There's the cartoonist who does his mostly scatological pictures as oil paintings. The bloke who dresses as a Roman legionary, the man wearing sandwich boards who claims to be responsible for peace in Ireland, not forgetting the defrocked Irish priest who capers to loud music bare-legged and in a kilt. Stewart Holmes the perennial demonstrator whose causes have shifted from anti-smoking to anti-nuclear to, now, get Brexit done. Such people used to be confined to Speaker's Corner at Tyburn in Hyde Park, London's old place of execution.

Now anyone who wants to conduct business in Westminster has to clamber through an obstacle course of protesters and barriers. No wonder hordes of tourists stand around blocking the pavements looking bemused.

It's difficult not to find metaphors for the current state of British politics in the crumbling buildings and multiple blockages. One thing is certain. This England, "the mother of parliaments", is abusing its baby. There is scant respect too for the politicians trying to make democracy work from the inside.

There have always been protest marches in central London but these are no longer enough for demonstrators who want to draw attention to their cause.

Politicians are partly to blame, falling over themselves to show they are "listening" to protesters and turning a blind eye to the increasingly aggressive tactics they are using. It's

no surprise that Extinction Rebellion is both urging parliament to act and proposing to replace it with "peoples assemblies".

Anxious not to be politically incorrect, the police mainly facilitate protests rather than clear obstructions.

Protests used to be banned in Parliament Square back in the 1980s and I witnessed mounted police blocking a student march coming down the Embankment. But by 1998 the New Labour government encouraged those seeking the extradition of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet to set up camp opposite parliament.

A rival pro-Pinochet camp soon turned up, then others with different axes to grind joined in. The Stop the War protester Brian Haw lived in Parliament Square for several years, sometimes accompanied by a small village of tents. The Countryside Alliance installed a pig in a pig sty there and flash mobs, often with political grievances from the Indian subcontinent, frequently crowd the square and Whitehall.

I am expressing no view on the merits of any of these protests, but I do wish to draw attention to their growing disrespect for other people and their lack of interest in democratic argument. Extinction Rebellion are just the latest manifestation of this escalating intolerance.

Perhaps bolstered by their own anxieties about global warming and guilt at their own consumption, the public have largely smiled benignly at these latest protests. The police have obliged by blocking any roads they have targeted. It looks suspiciously as if they have done a deal to ensure the Queen's Carriage gets uninterrupted passage to parliament for the state opening on Monday.

But if these demonstrators can shut down central London for a fortnight why shouldn't another group such as the English Defence League do the same?

There is no doubt that there is a problem with congestion around parliament. But there is a good reason to have a centre where the pillars of state - parliament, executive, civil service and established church can come together and have direct access to each other. Ensuring this happens should be the priority.

Some populists say parliament should move out of London - but this surely is to relegate it. Government should be at the heart of the nation in the capital, most accessible to all.

Since London has a history of more than a thousand years, the street layout is old. Major transport arteries converge on the city. This week buses and other road transport have not been able to operate on their usual routes. Governments and mayors have considered turning Parliament Square into a pedestrian zone, but no one can find where to put an alternative north-south route away from the Thames which flows in that direction at Westminster because of a bend in the river.

Plans are under way to repair and modernise parliament to make it a building fit for this century. Already some MPs are trying to curry favour by complaining about the cost of the renovation and the "full decant" to a temporary chamber nearby while it is under way. They should have more confidence in the importance of their work.

The last time parliament was this run down and obstructed was in 1834. The building

caught fire. Ordinary members of the public are said to have watched and jeered as it burnt down.

In all our interests it is high time we restored dignity and freedom of access to our parliament and the areas around it.

## **Why Shaheen Bagh protests are an important moment in India's history**

*Al Jazeera*, by Elizabeth Puranam, February 3, 2020

*A Muslim working class neighbourhood in New Delhi has emerged as epicentre of anti-CAA protests across India.*

New Delhi, India - "You have to go to Shaheen Bagh," I was told at a party on Christmas night in India's capital, New Delhi. "You can't cover the protests without going there. The atmosphere is amazing. It's like a block party."

For more than 50 days, people in Shaheen Bagh - a Muslim working-class neighbourhood - have been protesting against a new citizenship law that activists have dubbed "anti-Muslim".

Legal experts say the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which makes faith the basis for acquiring Indian nationality goes against the country's secular constitution. The law is currently being challenged in the Supreme Court.

Similar protests have broken out across the country after India's Hindu-nationalist government passed the amendment to the 1955 citizenship law on December 11 last year.

The government's plan to implement a nationwide counting of citizens has particularly spooked Muslims amid fears millions could be rendered stateless. A similar exercise in the northeastern Indian state of Assam excluded nearly two million people from the citizenship list (National Register of Citizens or NRC) last year.

### **Secularism and the constitution**

The government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, says the law does not discriminate against Muslims but is intended to help persecuted minorities from three neighbouring countries. It blocks the naturalisation for Muslims.

When I arrived in New Delhi to cover the anti-CAA protests, I realised these protests are an important moment in India's history.

I spent my first day at one of the main protest sites, Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI), where a thousand or so people had gathered on the main road outside the university. It was a bitterly cold December day, the coldest in over 100 years.

The temperature was dropping to as low as three degrees Celcius, but people - many of them women accompanied by their young children - sat on carpets on the road all day, while men stood on the sides.

Protesters listened to speakers talk about secularism and the constitution, and how the Modi government was threatening to undermine both.

A young girl, who looked no more than 10 years old, had a sign, reading "Save the constitution. Save India", pinned to her red sweater.

She could hardly wait to respond to the speaker asking: "Hum kyaa chaate hain?" (what do we want?) as she pumped her green glove-covered hand up in the air, screaming "azadi" (freedom) with every fibre of her being.

The "azadi" slogan, which has become popular across the country, has been inspired by Kashmiri separatists. Last August, the Muslim-majority region, which has witnessed an armed rebellion against Indian rule, was stripped of its limited autonomy.

Large murals, banners and posters denouncing the government and the law filled every inch of space on the university's walls and gates.

## **Indian flags**

The Indian flag was everywhere: Painted on people's faces; being flown from street lights; children held small flags; the adults waved large ones. A group of students in long white coats held up placards, which read "Medical Students against CAA" and "Our Prime Minister Is Sick".

The atmosphere was jovial even though Jamia was the site of what rights groups describe as a brutal crackdown by the police on peaceful protesters just a week earlier.

Jamia is a prominent Muslim institution and has students from all faiths. I interviewed Rupal Prabhakar - a Hindu woman - who had come to sing a prayer to the crowd in solidarity against the December 15 police action. She had never taken part in a protest or sung to a large crowd before. She told me she felt compelled to come because it was her duty to stop the government from dividing people along religious lines.

A young man passed a large cardboard box full of hot samosas around. A student distributed boxes of vegetable biryani; others handed out bananas and bottled water.

As is often the case in India, people insisted we have something to eat even after we said no. A chai wallah, or tea vendor, walked into our shot while I was talking to the camera, holding out his tray of steaming hot paper cups of masala tea, asking 'chai, madam?' I was happy that made it on air because incidents like those - random acts of kindness - summed up the atmosphere at Jamia to me.

On January 30, a gunman fired at a protest march near Jamia, injuring a student's arm. The attacker's Facebook profile showed he is a Hindu nationalist who supports the citizenship law.

January 30 was the 72nd anniversary of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi - the leader of India's freedom struggle - by a member of the Hindu far right, who believed in the supremacy of Hindus and blamed Gandhi for conceding too much to Muslims - India's largest minority. Thursday's attacker shared posts praising the man who killed Gandhi.

Just two days later, on February 1, another man opened fire at protesters in Shaheen Bagh, saying: "This country is not for everyone. It's only for Hindus."

On Sunday night, two people on a motorcycle fired shots in the air in Jamia - the third such incident in four days.

I did not have time to make it to Shaheen Bagh when I was in New Delhi in December, but I went on my first day on the job as India Correspondent on January 20.

When we arrived at the sit-in, we were greeted with a 10-metre tall installation of the map of India, with the words: "We the people of India say no to CAA, NCR, NPR."

There were many other installations, including one depicting a detention centre. The government is using such centres to lock away those who cannot prove their citizenship.

Huge posters hung from the overbridge, which spans the main road. People were proud of what they had created - a community centre facilitating discussion on what is happening in the country.

There was a tent offering free medical care. Hundreds of books were stacked up in tents serving as free book depositories. A chai wallah was making fresh tea, as people gathered around for a cup on a cold night.

We walked inside the largest tent, where hundreds of women and children listened to speakers. The older women sat at a long table at the front of the tent.

There were men and women of different faiths. An old man sat holding a Hindi-language bible in his hand.

The shootings at anti-CAA protests in Jamia and Shaheen Bagh come in the wake of hate speeches given by governing party leaders, who have dubbed Shaheen Bagh a centre of "anti-national activity".

Last week, Minister of State for Finance and Corporate Affairs Anurag Thakur condemned the Shaheen Bagh protests, leading chants of "shoot the traitors" at a BJP election rally in New Delhi.

Earlier, Parvesh Varma, a BJP member of parliament from West Delhi, said the people at Shaheen Bagh are "Muslims who want to take over India" and that they would rape and kill New Delhi residents.

On Sunday, at least 100 government supporters gathered near Shaheen Bagh, chanting: "Shoot the traitors."

A few yards away, a banner placed in the middle of the road, which connects New Delhi to the satellite city of Noida, read: "Aao baithen, baat karen (come, let's talk)."

## **Vocabulary from the articles :**

shrouded : voilé / enveloppé / dissimulé  
scaffolding : échafaudage  
chime : sonner / carillonner  
out of order : en panne / hors d'usage  
strewn : éparpillé  
cluttered by : en désordre / encombré  
fence : clôture / barrière / obstacle  
blast proof : résistant aux explosions  
to drift about : dériver  
bloke : mec / gars / type  
to caper : faire des cabrioles / gambader  
to shift (from...to...) : passer (de...à...)  
to clamber : se hisser / escalader / grimper  
bemused : perplexe / déconcerté / dérouté  
crumbling : qui s'écroule  
to draw attention to : attirer l'attention sur  
to turn a blind eye to : fermer les yeux sur  
grievances : doléances  
bolstered by : soutenu par  
a fortnight : quinze jours  
pedestrian : piéton  
to repair : réparer  
under way : en cours  
to jeer : huer / pousser des cris hostiles  
dubbed : surnommé  
to challenge : contester / remettre en cause  
stateless : apatride  
bitter : amer  
to undermine : miner / saper / ébranler / discréditer  
crackdown : répression  
to greet : accueillir  
chant : slogan / chant (de supporters) > to chant : scander

## **Thematic vocabulary : conflict, unrest, activism and protesting**

### **Examples in the news :**

<https://www.3aw.com.au/protesters-calling-for-end-of-racial-panic-and-lifting-of-china-travel-ban-set-to-disrupt-the-cbd/>

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<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/02/05/reject-cover-up-protests-take-place-after-expected-trump-acquittal/4668495002/>

<https://news3lv.com/features/the-homeless-project/thehomelessproject-mayor-goodman-accuses-protesters-of-working-for-nonprofits>

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<https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/nick-ferrari/enough-enough/message-to-extinction-rebellion-protesters/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2020/feb/07/climate-activists-bring-trojan-horse-to-british-museum>

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/russellflannery/2020/02/04/u-s-lawmakers-nominate-hong-kong-protesters-for-nobel-peace-prize/#50f43b356c95>

<https://nebraska.tv/news/local/aclu-sues-montana-over-keystone-xl-protest-plans-02-07-2020>

<https://pamplinmedia.com/pt/9-news/450963-367568-climate-bill-protesters-rev-up-for-lap-around-capitol->