

Why women oppose the Police, Crime, Sentencing & Courts Bill

Women Against Rape and Women of Colour Global Women's Strike



We have been organising for decades for protection and justice from a pandemic of sexual and domestic violence against women and children, reinforced by policies of austerity that target us, undermining our financial independence and therefore our safety. Survivors of rape and domestic violence have come forward, nationally and internationally, reporting an epidemic of sexual violence in our homes, our workplaces, our schools – including by police officers.

In 1985 we supported Jackie Berkeley, a young Black woman who was raped in a Manchester police cell. The shocking [treatment by police](#) of murdered sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman shows how little has changed.

Our demands for justice and protection have been met with further decriminalisation of these crimes and the repression of our

movements through the Police Bill, which would give police and courts unprecedented powers against us. Women are at the forefront of peaceful direct actions in pursuit of justice: anti-rape protests, campaigns against the family courts, the climate justice movement including Youth Strike for Climate, Black Lives Matter, Gypsy, Roma and Travellers' rights, the Palestinian-led BDS movement, and family campaigns against death custody, racist murders, stop and search, sexist, racist and anti-working-class policing . . . We will all be the targets of this repression.



In an attempt to use women's fury against the impunity of rapists and other abusers, the Bill offers longer sentences for violent crimes. This would only affect a tiny minority of attackers because the vast majority are never taken to court; it is a smokescreen for a Bill leading towards a police state – substituting justice with widespread repression. The Bill would encourage police illegality, sexism, racism and corruption. Let's

not forget that the police whose powers are being massive enhanced have been found to be institutionally sexist, racist and corrupt.

The police don't need more powers. They need to be accountable to our communities and use the powers they have to protect women and children against violent men, including police officers, instead of criminalising us, especially if we are working-class and of colour.

As people from different sectors and backgrounds are exposing historic injustices perpetrated by police, CPS and courts, this Bill seems to aim at provoking a confrontation with the public and paves

the way for a police state. If passed, it will attract more misogynists, racists and violent extremists to the police force. It must not become law. Protestors have already seen a marked increase in police aggression and provocation, kettling or ordering us to move, or bullying us about what time to shut our events or even prevent us from holding protests.

Some context for the Police Bill.

Police and CPS have decriminalized rape and DV

- Prosecutions are down to 1.6% of reported rapes; convictions for domestic violence are similarly low.
- The police and Crown Prosecution Service are biased. They investigate victims rather than suspects, including by scouring victims' digital devices, examining her social and sexual history and her medical records, nicknamed the 'digital strip search'. Cases are then discredited and dropped. They even prosecute women for 'lying' or for speaking out when the State has refused to act
- This method of policing protects rapists as many victims refuse to give consent, or withdraw from a prosecution, or decide not to report at all.
- In 2020, following an outcry, the Information Commissioner's Office and a court challenge ruled digital searches are an extremely disproportionate intrusion into people's privacy.
- Improvements the anti-rape movement won in the police response to rape seem to have been abandoned in recent years: Specialist 'Sapphire' units were closed, trained detectives and ring-fenced time lost.
- Two to three women are killed every week by a partner or ex-partner, often after multiple calls to the police for help. Despite this, charges of domestic abuse are downgraded, often to 'common assault', disregarding major injuries and the impact on

women and children's lives, and limiting to six months the time available for prosecution.

- 'Weaker' cases are dropped. But juries, if given the evidence, are often less prejudiced than the CPS. We have complained about cases ending in acquittal because CPS prosecutors were uninterested, unprepared, neglected key evidence.
- The CPS are also racist: men of colour are **disproportionately pursued** for rape and domestic abuse. What does that mean for women of colour who report?
- Sex workers who report violent men often find the police unwilling to act against them and instead suffer police raids, arrests, demands for free sex and theft, and would experience even more police illegality and racism under this Bill.



Police refused to investigate child abuse.

- We still have not heard any adequate official response to the mass rape and trafficking of teenage girls exposed in 2013, which police and social workers enabled.
- Many of the victims lived in care homes, in towns and cities around the country: Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford, Jersey, Shirley Oaks in London . . .
- Police dismissed the rape of children as a 'lifestyle choice' or actively colluded. When will there be transparent investigations, mass sackings and prosecutions of officers, local councillors and social workers and all others involved?
- Police covered up their inaction/collusion claiming they were afraid of being accused of racism when the suspects were Asian and the victims white, yet they routinely stop-and-search men of colour without any concern of being called racist. The media and politicians have pushed racist stereotypes of Black men to promote this racism, hiding both victims of colour and the fact that abusers of children who get away with it are overwhelmingly white.
- Police are increasingly embedded in our schools, despite opposition by young people, parents, teachers and communities.

Police back social services when they take children from their mothers.

- Mothers who report domestic violence are commonly accused of lying by violent partners. Social workers and family courts often back fathers, removing children rather than supporting the mother with resources and safety.
- Between 2004 and 2020, 91% of 69 children killed by parents with a known history of violence were killed by fathers known to police and/or social services.

Police officers commit sexual assaults with impunity.

- The police job is to enforce the law, but too many officers are corrupt and abuse their powers to commit violent and other crimes. Officers who joined the service to uphold the law aren't always the ones who get promoted.
- Of 562 police officers accused of sexual assault, just 43 were investigated, none convicted (2012-2018).

After the police attacked the Sarah Everard vigil, women officers stated publicly that some officers expect sex from victims of crime, and that sexual abuse by male colleagues is rife. We know this from victims we're in touch with. They rarely get justice: if any action is taken, it is usually a "disciplinary" allowing abusers to slip into another job

Police officers assault colleagues and wives with impunity.

- Of 666 reports of domestic abuse by police officers, only 5% were convicted.
- "One woman every week comes forward to report their police officer partner seriously abusing them or their children."¹
- Victims described on Radio 4² how police colleagues refused to investigate and back a prosecution. One perpetrator said he could do anything, and threatened to have his partner's child removed if she complained.
- Former senior officers state that violent police are a "significant minority". Abusers who want power and control join the police, among other institutions.

Deaths in custody – impunity for officers.

- More than 1,746 people have died at the hands of police and immigration officers since 1990. Until PC Benjamin Monk was

¹ Channel 4 News 18 May 2021

² Woman's Hour 21 May 2021

convicted of the manslaughter of former footballer Dalian Atkinson in June 2021, no officer had been convicted for 40 years. Shockingly, Monk only got eight years and will be out in five. Would a Black man who killed a white officer get off so lightly?

- Black women also suffer serious police violence. Sarah Reed was assaulted by an officer after shop staff called the police accusing her of shoplifting. The officer was convicted of assault, proved by CCTV. Sarah Reed was later found dead in a cell at Holloway Prison.



Police commit crimes and cover up with impunity.

- South Yorkshire Police, among others, were responsible for the unlawful killing of 96 fans at Hillsborough, tampering with police statements, and collusion with the media in blaming the victims.
- Victims' families are furious that despite decades of campaigning against this "orchestrated cover-up" no police were punished for their crimes.

- South Yorkshire was also responsible for violence and false charges against striking miners at Orgreave.
- Fitting up and blacklisting trade union organisers like the actor Ricky Tomlinson, finally exonerated decades later.
- The Metropolitan Police are under the leadership of Cressida Dick who oversaw the execution of Jean Charles De Menezes and the coverup that followed. Instead of being held accountable and sacked, she was promoted to be the first woman Met Commissioner. She denies that her force is racist, sexist or corrupt.
- The police deceived women in environmental and justice movements they were sent to spy on, sleeping with them, even having children. They spied on bereaved families, such as the family of Stephen Lawrence, and many other campaigners.
- Instead of waiting for the Undercover Policing Inquiry to conclude, as many of us demanded, the government rushed through the Spy Cops Bill, with even more sweeping powers of impunity and therefore more and worse abuse of women.

Police racism and discrimination against people with disabilities.

- People suffering mental ill-health – particularly people of colour – are indiscriminately tasered. Deaths in custody are twice as likely when the person is Black and suffering mental ill health.
- Black people are stopped and searched by police **nine times** more often than white people, and 35% more often under section 60 where no reason is required. Asian people are **2.5 times more likely** to be stopped for drugs.
- Disabled campaigners are assaulted and spied on by police and **reported** to the Department of Work and Pensions, threatening their benefits, as admitted by Greater Manchester and Lancashire forces re anti-frackers.

- People having a mental health crisis – particularly people of colour – are indiscriminately tasered. Women have been tasered by police before being sectioned in psychiatric hospital. People taken into police custody are twice as likely to die if they are Black and in mental distress.
- The StopSIM campaign opposes an [NHS scheme](#) devised by a policeman where people in mental distress who are “high users” A&E can be turned away, denying them medical attention and making it more likely they will be dealt with by police.

The Tory ‘hostile environment’ which the police are called to enforce.

- Officers implement Home Office immigration raids – we remember Joy Gardener and others killed or injured during such raids.
- Women with limited immigration status are denied ‘recourse to public funds’ making them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Police routinely report immigrant victims to the Home Office so many cannot come forward even in an emergency. Mothers whose immigration status depends on remaining with a violent partner fear their children will be taken from them and they could be deported if they speak out.
- The Home Secretary’s [New Immigration Plan](#) and Bill aims to deny immigrants ever getting settled status. Victims of rape or other violence who are immigrant or seeking asylum are already routinely disbelieved and deported to the unsafe country they fled.

Government policies that increase poverty and violence.

- Denying women housing and other resources prevents us from leaving violent men.
- Mothers and young people are driven into ‘survival sex’ or drugs, and criminalised for poverty. Even ex-head of Merseyside police

said if given £5 billion to tackle crime, he would spend 80% on cutting poverty and deprivation.



On the pretext of ‘preventing serious crime’ the Police Bill would:

- Remove the right to protest by criminalising protests which are ‘noisy’, ‘annoying’, cause ‘obstruction’, ‘trespass’ and ‘nuisance’. Penalties include fines or prison for organisers; up to 10 years in prison for damaging a memorial.
- Criminalise Gypsy, Roma & Travellers who stop in unauthorised places.
- Bring in new Serious Violent Crime Reduction Orders – civil injunctions leading to curfews and more stop and search powers without suspicion or reason. Questioning officers’ reasons for the search is a fast track to criminalisation, bypassing any court.
- Legally oblige public sector workers to inform on the public, working with the police to predict crime, including those in

healthcare, schools and youth services. This extends the discredited racist Prevent programme. Police are already and increasingly embedded in schools and mental health services.

- Lengthen sentences, and move the automatic release date from half-way through a sentence to two-thirds.
- Whole life sentences for children. Shockingly, the UK has one of the lowest ages in the world at which children are considered 'criminally responsible' and can be tried and imprisoned (10 years). We are horrified that the Bill would increase the criminalisation of children and without even considering evidence of [widespread abuse by guards in juvenile secure units](#), secure children's homes and detention centres. This attack on children is an attack on mothers, who will bear the pain and worry of caring for children being treated like adults by the criminal justice system.
- The Bill encourages police violence, and expands the prison/detention complex, criminalising working-class communities, especially women and people of colour. 80% of women sent to prison are there for crimes of poverty.
- Consent is not freely given. The Bill would make it illegal for police and other officials to extract information from digital devices without the consent of victims and witnesses, but this is no protection for victims of rape when they are told that their case will be dropped if they refuse.





This Police Bill adds to repressive laws like Spy Cops which **decriminalise crimes committed by agents of the State**, particularly the police, and **criminalise anyone protesting against injustices and abuse of power**. Movement pressure won amendments to the Overseas Operations Bill, defeating measures which gave sweeping impunity to UK military abroad.

Parliament must vote down the Police Bill. We are part of building a movement against it.

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