

The Death Throes of Free Speech in the United Kingdom

From Geoffrey Clarfield from the [American Spectator](#)

This is not the England I grew up to admire in the 60s and 70s. This is a long piece but worth reading in full beyond the edited highlights here.

Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia, in a famous 2006 interview, spoke nostalgically of how “I went to England, and I felt at home. There is no doubt that American culture, American common culture, which nobody has to belong to, originates with English culture, and that includes Shakespeare, it includes nursery rhymes that we all know, and that we use as examples. That’s our common culture, and I think our framers recognized that.” Most Americans are, at heart, Anglophiles

Yet when we look upon England in its current abject state, we begin to wonder whether we would still feel “at home” there, as once we largely did.



London, England (Misteriad/Shutterstock)

There is no denying that the new Labour government under Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer has made rather a bad start. Its policies have proven ridiculous at best, contemptible at

worst. A tremendous amount of political capital is being expended on implementing the moral monstrosity of “medical assistance in dying,”. . .

. . . Crippling death duties are to be assessed against farmers, while left-wing journalists [support](#) the measure by claiming that “Farmers have hoarded land for too long. Inheritance tax will bring new life to rural Britain,” language directly echoing that of Stalinist de-kulakization campaigns. It is with the ongoing suppression of free speech in Britain, however, that the Starmer regime has reached its nadir.

Whereas the Stuart monarchs merely grumbled about Paul’s Walk, the British government is taking a more proactive approach to its modern-day equivalent, social media. There is, admittedly, a precedent for this. In 2017, under a (nominally) Conservative government, something like nine people were being arrested per day, five of which would eventually be charged, for online speech offenses.

These are numbers that we would normally associate with Putinist Russia, and yet they are happening in the land of “freeborn Englishmen.”

An uptick in arrests and convictions for “online hate speech” has occurred in the aftermath of this summer’s anti-immigration Southport riot, with judges warning that “so called keyboard warriors” must “learn to take responsibility for their inflammatory and disgusting language,” and with police constabularies warning that “there is nowhere to hide.” The official X account of the United Kingdom has urged its populace to “Think before you post,” while the London Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mark Rowley has vowed that “we will throw the full force of the law at people and whether you’re in this country committing crimes on the streets or committing crimes from further afield online we will come after you.” Terms like “Orwellian,” “Big Brother,” and

“thoughtcrime” naturally come to mind. George Orwell argued in a 1948 essay, “[T]hreats to freedom of speech, writing and action, though often trivial in isolation, are cumulative in their effect and, unless checked, lead to a general disrespect for the rights of the citizen,” and we are rapidly approaching that point, as the United Kingdom descends into the sort of grey, dystopian anarcho-tyranny in which a 53-year-old Cheshire housewife is imprisoned for angry Facebook posts at the same time that a child rapist is given a supervision order and prematurely set free on the grounds of “prison overcrowding.”

“We’re watching the end of an ancient and once rather wonderful civilisation,” Peter Hitchens [lamented](#) more than a decade ago. “You’re watching the end of it. It’s how these things go – neither with a bang nor with a whimper, but with the country sinking giggling into the sea.” State-assisted (and eventually state-mandated, no doubt) suicide, dekulakization, a crackdown on freedom of expression – it all does seem like the death throes of a civilization.

The prospect of the United Kingdom “sinking giggling into the sea” has certain ramifications on the other side of the Atlantic. We have already seen the London Metropolitan Police Commissioner threatening to “come after” those who commit alleged hate speech offenses abroad. The Center for Countering Digital Hate, originally incorporated in London as Brixton Endeavours Limited, has targeted social media platforms and numerous conservative news sites, with leaked documents indicating that the non-profit’s “annual priorities” include initiatives to “Kill Musk’s Twitter,” “Trigger EU and UK regulatory action,” and make “Progress towards change in USA,” prompting Elon Musk to label it as a “criminal organization.” New laws being introduced in the U.K. will allow regulators to levy fines on U.S. tech companies assessed on the basis of “global revenue,” meaning that penalties imposed against X, for example, could conceivably be calculated based on Tesla,

SpaceX, Neuralink, xAI, and the Boring Co. sales.

All of this is completely unacceptable, and has prompted Vice President-elect JD Vance to link the heretofore distinct issues of free speech and military support: "NATO wants us to continue being a good participant in this military alliance – why don't you respect American values and respect free speech?" According to Vance, "We have to say that American power comes with certain strings attached, and one of those is: respect free speech." If the United States represents the sole guarantor of British and European peace and security, particularly with a revanchist Russia threatening NATO's eastern flank, and if the United Kingdom is content to let its military waste away – a recent House of Lords committee report found that the "UK's Armed Forces lack the mass, resilience and internal coherence necessary to maintain a deterrent effect and respond effectively to prolonged and high-intensity warfare" – then Washington has a considerable amount of leverage, which can be employed to preserve our most fundamental civilizational values. Transatlantic security remains a matter of profound importance, but the notion that our closest allies can shelter under our defense umbrella while undermining basic human and civil rights, and even targeting some of our most successful industries, can no longer be tolerated.

Once upon a time, Paul's Walk was the "land's epitome," the "great exchange of all discourse" where ideas were formed, criticized, and disseminated. Now, the public square has shifted to the internet and social media, where again the constant "still roar or loud whisper" of the world's opinions can be heard. Free speech remains as necessary as it was in the days of Milton, who rightly maintained that "the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience" was "above all liberties." If Britain has forgotten this, America has not...

And then, might we dare envision, as Milton did

in *Areopagitica*, a British renaissance: “Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam.” Yet that can only happen where unfettered speech is viewed not with dread, and not with contempt, but as the essential condition of a free people.

Read it all [here](#)