



UK's Thought Police arrest a woman because of what she “might” be thinking while standing on a street near an abortion clinic

Description

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A charity volunteer has been arrested and charged on four counts after she told the police she “might” be praying silently when questioned as to why she was standing on a public street near an abortion facility.

She wasn't arrested for harassing anyone. She wasn't arrested for protesting. She was arrested for private thoughts inside her own mind.

Director of the March for Life UK, Isabel Vaughn-Spruce, was standing near the British Pregnancy Advisory Service clinic in Kings Norton, Birmingham. She was standing calmly, carrying no sign and in complete silence. An onlooker, who suspected that Vaughn-Spruce was praying silently in her mind, complained to the police. Police arrived and asked Vaughn-Spruce what she was doing. Vaughn-Spruce was searched, arrested and then interrogated.

All Things ProLife: Woman Arrested for Silently Praying, 22 December 2022 (7 mins)

Whilst in the police station, police showed her pictures of herself standing near the clinic and asked her if she was praying. Vaughn-Spruce said she “might” have been praying but could not recall if she was praying at these specific moments, or whether she was thinking about something else, such as her lunch. She was charged with four counts. As part of her conditions for bail, Vaughn-Spruce was told that she should not contact a local Catholic priest who was also involved in pro-life work – a condition that was later dropped.

Her arrest follows [another recent incident in Bournemouth](#) where a woman was told to leave by local authorities for praying, even outside of the local censorship zone.

Last year, [a grandmother from Liverpool](#) successfully overturned her charge on human rights grounds

after she was arrested and fined for praying silently near an abortion facility on a walk during lockdown.

“It’s abhorrently wrong that I was searched, arrested, interrogated by police and charged simply for praying in the privacy of my own mind. Censorship zones purport to ban harassment, which is already illegal. Nobody should ever be subject to harassment. But what I did was the furthest thing from harmful – I was exercising my freedom of thought, my freedom of religion, inside the privacy of my own mind. Nobody should be criminalised for thinking and for praying, in a public space in the UK”, [Vaughan-Spruce said](#) following her arrest.

“Isabel’s experience should be deeply concerning to all those who believe that our hard-fought fundamental rights are worth protecting. It is truly astonishing that the law has granted local authorities such wide and unaccountable discretion, that now even thoughts deemed ‘wrong’ can lead to a humiliating arrest and a criminal charge,” [said Jeremiah Igunnubole](#), Legal Counsel for ADF UK, the legal organisation supporting Vaughan-Spruce.

“A mature democracy should be able to differentiate between criminal conduct and the peaceful exercise of constitutionally protected rights. Isabel, a woman of good character, and who has tirelessly served her community by providing charitable assistance to vulnerable women and children, has been treated no better than a violent criminal. The recent increase in buffer zone legislation and orders is a watershed moment in our country. We must ask ourselves whether we are a genuinely democratic country committed to protecting the peaceful exercise of the right to freedom of speech. We are at serious risk of mindlessly sleepwalking into a society that accepts, normalises, and even promotes the ‘tyranny of the majority’,” he continued.

You can support Vaughan-Spruce’s legal case [HERE](#).

The Public Space Protection Order (“PSPO”) introduced by authorities in Birmingham criminalises individuals perceived to be “engaging in any act of approval or disapproval or attempted act of approval or disapproval” in relation to abortion, including through “verbal or written means, prayer or counselling...”.

Parliamentarians are currently considering introducing blanket censorship zones across England and Wales rather than on the local level through PSPOs. An amendment to the [Public Order Bill](#) would prevent pro-lifers from “influencing”, “advising”, “persuading”, “informing”, “occupying space” or even “expressing opinion” within 150m of an abortion clinic. Those who breach the rules could face up to two years in prison. As written, the Government has said that the clause is [not compatible with human rights law](#).

A couple of weeks ago, the [UK Supreme Court ruled Northern Ireland](#) can ban prayer and peaceful protest outside abortion clinics. Judges unanimously rejected the Northern Ireland Attorney General’s appeal against the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Bill – tabled by Green Party MLA Clare Bailey. Supreme Court Justice Lord Reed accepted that the plans would restrict the European Convention rights of protesters, but said this was “justifiable.”

The [Scottish government have shown support](#) for Green Party MSP Gillian Mackay’s bill to introduce censorship zones around abortion facilities across Scotland. The Scottish bill bears similar wording to that of the Northern Irish bill, banning “influence” within 150m of an abortion facility. An extra 100m ban would be available to be granted upon request to expand the boundary of the buffer zone. The

Scottish government made it clear at the Supreme Court hearing in July that they would include prayer within the scope of “influencing” in their legislation – the Lord Advocate testified that silent prayer could cause “psychological damage.”

George Orwell's novel ‘1984’ [warns about the ultimate goal of authoritarianism and totalitarian forms of government](#) – the absorption of the individual into the state. In Orwell's nightmare vision the key goal of the Party is the destruction of the individual. And [thoughtcrime](#) is the essential concept. It is the idea that simply *thinking* something contrary to what the Party has decreed to be true is a crime, an idea that requires people to self-edit their thoughts.

“Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. Whether he went on with the diary, or whether he did not go on with it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. He had committed – would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper – the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it.” – [1984, George Orwell](#)

We have an inalienable right to think freely. We should take heed of Orwell's warning before the government destroys our freedom to be ourselves, our individuality, our private self and our sense of self.

A message to those who feel good snitching on their neighbour for “thoughtcrime”: Today you might feel good reporting your neighbour because you and the state disagree with what they might, possibly, perhaps be thinking but tomorrow it will be you who is arrested for what you “might” be thinking. Totalitarian regimes do not go away of their own accord or treat you well because you have been obedient. They only become more intrusive, more controlling and crueler. Do not assist or enable a totalitarian regime.

Sources and resources:

- [UK Supreme Court to rule TOMORROW on “censorship zone” human rights concerns outside abortion facilities](#), ADF, 6 December 2022
- [Supreme Court backs NI abortion censorship zones outlawing silent prayer](#), The Christian Institute, 8 December 2022
- [Censorship zones around abortion clinics represent another nail in the coffin of liberal democracy](#), 1828, 13 December 2022
- [Woman arrested because she “might” be praying near abortion clinic](#), Right to Life, 21 December 2022
- [Charity volunteer arrested, charged for silent prayer “thoughtcrime” near abortion facility](#), ADF, 20 December 2022
- [INSANE: British cops arrest woman for praying silently](#), Peter Imanuelsen, 23 December 2022

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