

Hiding in the Shadows

(Charles Walker)

Our freedoms are like the air we breathe – they’re fundamental to us as a nation and to who we are as it’s people. Yet once again we stand on the threshold of using the rule of law to undermine the rule of law, the foundations of which have been laid over centuries.

We are not “asking” our constituents to do anything – we have never “asked” – we have coerced them. We have coerced them through criminal and civil law. Let us not use that word “ask”, for it is not an accurate description of what we have done: we have criminalised freedom of association; the freedom to go about one’s business; the freedom to travel; and the freedom to protest.

The freedom to protest - that is the oxygen of democracy. It hurts my head and it hurts my heart and dismissing these sincerely held concerns as “wanting to let the virus rip” is both deeply ungenerous and deeply, deeply unkind. But in responding to that charge I say: if this parliament is not the place for disputation, delectable or otherwise, where is this rigour to be found? And I want people to live long lives, full lives, happy lives – myself included. But my mortality – our mortality – is ultimately our contract with our maker, whereas our fundamental rights are our contract with government.

So I will not be supporting this legislation – I think it is terribly unjust and in many parts cruel. I will have no part in criminalising parents for seeing their children, and children for seeing their parents – no part! This legislation goes against my every instinct – perhaps an instinct even more fundamental than the love and touch of my family.

And I am not living in fear of the virus – I will not live in fear of the virus – but I am living in fear of something much darker – much darker – hiding in the shadows. And, when the sunlight returns – and it will return – I hope it chases those shadows away! But I can’t be sure that it will – I cannot be sure – and that is at the heart of my anxiety, and the anxiety of so many of the people I represent in this place.