



TRIBUTE: People including deputy Labour leader Angela Rayner, centre, looking at flowers after laying a floral tribute for Sarah Everard at the bandstand in Clapham Common, London PICTURE: Jonathan Brady/PA

# Street harassment is a daily feature of life for many women

**A** FEW years ago, in the early days of the Trump presidency, millions of women across the world took part in the Women's March.

Amongst huge crowds of women angry that a misogynistic former reality TV star had somehow risen to the most powerful job in politics, one stood out.

An elderly woman, who had the look of someone who had been there before, waved a memorably swearsy placard which read 'I can't believe I still have to protest this f\*\*\*ing sh\*t'.

The murder of Sarah Everard in London has brought back painful memories for many women. The endless calculations women have to make while walking alone – how close is this other person, could they hurt me, could I run away – are exhausting. An attempted mugging and assault in Dublin years ago – at the outrageously late time of 4pm – left me wary of visiting cashpoints on my own for over a decade.

The gang of teenage boys who cornered me on a midday jog on a busy path, on top of various other comments and harassment over the years, prompted me to never run outside again.

Following the disappearance and murder of Sarah Everard in London, the Metropolitan Police warned women not to walk alone at night. But in mine and most women's experience, attacks can happen at any time of the day. Harassment and fear is simply a daily feature of life for many women, as regular and inevitable as sunset.

The response of the Metropolitan Police to an event in London in memory of Ms Everard showed a basic lack of awareness about the realities women face.

It wasn't a protest. It was a vigil in memory of a young woman who'd been killed.

The Fire Brigades Union National Women's Committee described the

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policing of the vigil as "shocking and unacceptable".

"This was a clear demonstration of the patriarchy's inability to comprehend the reality and scope of male violence against women and girls," the committee said.

Images of a young woman forced to the ground by Metropolitan Police officers contrasted badly with photos of police from the same force forming a cordon to protect a statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square.

The policing of the vigil has turned into a public relations disaster for the Met.

It seems particularly bad timing that the government's landmark policing bill seeks to give more power to police over protests.

In yet another ill-advised move, the government is trying to rush through legislation which could lead to harsher

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penalties for damaging a statue than attacking a woman.

Hastily drawn up following the Black Lives Matter protests over the summer, the bill gives the impression that the government cares more about statues of people with dubious pasts than living people.

Rows over statues play well to voters who think that colonialism and slavery are simply facets of the past and should remain there.

Churchill as a war leader is more palatable than Churchill as a racist and imperialist.

Similarly, Ms Everard's murder and Saturday's vigil has prompted many women to speak out about wider misogynistic attitudes.

Harassment stems from the belief that you have a right to accost a woman in the street and that she must acknowledge and listen to you.

Boris Johnson's claim that the government will "make sure" that women feel "properly heard" when they make complaints about violence would sound more convincing if the policing bill wasn't a complete mess.

According to UN Women UK, 97 per cent of women aged between 18 and 24 have been sexually harassed. Four-fifths of all women said they had experienced sexual harassment in public.

The YouGov survey of 1,000 women found that 96 per cent of respondents did not report incidents and 45 per cent said reporting them would not change anything. With that level of confidence in the police's ability to tackle harassment, is it any wonder that women turned out in London in such numbers?

The poet Sylvia Plath wrote in her journal that "being born a woman is my awful tragedy... I want to be able to sleep in an open field, to travel west, to walk freely at night..."

Women simply want to be allowed to live our lives without fear, without unwanted approaches.

I can't believe we still have to protest this f\*\*\*ing s\*\*\*.

## ON THIS DAY

MARCH 17 1971

### Beleaguered PM May Resign

AS A question mark hangs over his personal political future, the Stormont Prime Minister, Mr Chichester-Clark will make a major statement at Stormont tomorrow about his London talks yesterday with the British PM, Mr Edward Heath and his Home Secretary, Mr Reginald Maudling. Shortly after he arrived back in Belfast last night, the Government Press Office said the purpose of Mr Chichester-Clark's visit 'was to discuss with UK Ministers further means by which the campaign against IRA terrorism may be waged with increased effectiveness'.

Last night Whitehall treated with reserve reports that the Prime Minister intended to resign if he did not get fifty per cent more troops in NI; control of the troops and power to intern suspects without trial. Mr Chichester-Clark returned to Belfast as he had left yesterday – in secret. The NI GOC, Lt. General Harry Tuzo also attended yesterday's discussions. Direct Rule by Westminster was not on the agenda.

### Faulkner Gets Rough Ride

MR Brian Faulkner, Minister of Development, faced a 700-strong angry crowd when he addressed a Unionist meeting at Dromore, County Tyrone last night. He was heckled and booed and greeted with foot-stamping and jeering as he delivered a prepared speech with difficulty. In his speech he appealed for unity in the Unionist Party and support for the Government but the meeting passed a resolution of 'no confidence' in the Government and called for its immediate resignation.

As Mr Faulkner walked onto the stage to the tune of *The Sash*, he was met with shouts of 'Lundy' and 'Up Paisley'. At one stage he walked to the front of the platform and, amid the uproar, accused a man of saying that he was telling lies. Mr Faulkner said: 'I am damned well not going to be called a liar by you or anyone else.' Later a man lifted a chair and made toward the platform but was restrained by others.

### Bernadette is 'Misdirected' – Lynch

THE Taoiseach, Mr Jack Lynch said in Washington yesterday he thought Bernadette Devlin's former idealism was now being misdirected and had lost the support of the majority of the Irish people. (By March 1971 the Unionist Party was in turmoil, buffeted by right-wing resistance to reform, on the one hand, and IRA violence, on the other. Brian Faulkner, previously seen as a hardliner, was deemed responsible for removing the power to allocate houses from the councils and vesting it in an impartial Housing Executive. This, together with the adoption of 'one man, one vote' and a pledge to end gerrymandering in Derry and elsewhere spelled the end for Unionist ascendancy west of the Bann.)

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