

INTERVIEW/LIVIA TOSSICI BOLT

'Standing outside abortion clinics is about freedom for everyone'

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

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"In Britain the problem of free speech is so grave that people are frightened to voice their opinions in case they are arrested or prosecuted for alleged "hate speech". This is Livia Tossici Bolt speaking to the *Daily Compass*, the Italian-English retired scientist, **found guilty**

last 4 April at Poole Magistrate Court for refusing to leave an abortion clinic protection zone in Bournemouth where she was holding a sign, without mentioning abortion, inviting anyone passing by to talk to her if they wanted to: two years conditional discharge and £20,000 court costs the [judge ordered](#).

The disputed events date back to March 2023, but the case caused an international stir because the conviction followed US Vice President J.D. Vance's famous [speech at the Munich Security Conference](#), in which he criticised restrictions on freedom of expression in England and Scotland. Vance specifically referenced the convictions of pro-life activists for praying near abortion clinics.

In contrast to the aggressive image of pro-life activists portrayed by the abortion lobby, Livia Tossici Bolt speaks frankly and kindly about her experience. She often laughs at the inconsistencies she faced in court, but also talks compassionately about the solidarity she feels for the real victims of abortion: vulnerable pregnant women who are faced with a life-changing choice.

Nearly two months have passed since you were found guilty of breaching a “buffer zone” in Bournemouth. In retrospect, what stands out for you about your court case?

That it was a good experience because it highlighted that free speech is really under threat in the UK. That it gave me lots of opportunities to talk about my faith and the solidarity I feel for every vulnerable woman who goes for an abortion. I am sure this was thanks to all the prayers that were said for me before and while I was in court. Throughout the trial I held a small holy wooden heart from Jerusalem that a nun, Sister Anastasia, gave me. She told me it carries “10 years of her prayers” with it.

Did talking about your faith help your cause?

It did because it gave the judge an idea of my character. I was asked lots of questions about my past activities as Coordinator of the Bournemouth branch of 40 Days for Life before the buffer zone was in place. I talked about how my Christian faith inspires my love for life and acts of charity. I was wearing a rosary around my neck so I showed it to the court when asked to explain what prayer involves during vigils. I was asked what inspired me to approach the women and couples near the clinic. I told them, “inspiration from the Holy Spirit”. However, I must be clear that on the day I was approached by the Community Safety Accredited Scheme officers (CSAS) I was intent on not breaking any of the terms of the buffer zone. I was completely passive, simply standing still and holding a sign offering to talk if anyone wanted to and not just clinic users. Don't forget it was just after Covid when many people had suffered loneliness due to the lockdown: I

wanted to connect with the local community. In fact, I was not found guilty of protesting against abortion, nor of harassment or intimidation which are the activities forbidden in a buffer zone.

Were you convicted for promoting consensual conversation then?

In a way, yes. The judge found me guilty because I failed without a “reasonable excuse” to comply with the CSAS officers request to leave the buffer zone. I have always maintained that “I am a law abiding citizen” and would have left the area if the officers had explained to me why holding a sign saying “hear to talk if you want”, was a breach of any of the prohibitions of the buffer zone. But my past activities as the leader of 40 Days for Life in Bournemouth seems to have been a determinant factor in forming my conviction. The judge found that as I am a well known pro-life figure in the area, the officers, who had responded to the complaint against me, were justified in thinking my presence was detrimental to clients and staff of the clinic. Curiously, their body cam footage used as evidence against me was corrupted, so only two short clips were shown of me and missing our discussions on the activities forbidden in the zone, none of which I had committed by holding a sign inviting consensual conversation.

It seems that consensual conversation is legitimate in Britain in a buffer zone unless you are not a pro-life supporter.

It's funny you should say that, (Livia laughs). Paradoxically, after the officers had left, the very man who had made the complaint to the police came to tell me I couldn't stand there because I was in a PSPO. Apparently, he didn't find me too intimidating to talk to. He asked me about my opinions on abortion. And as he is pro-abortion, as I later found out, he seemed to have forgotten that the buffer zone restrictions also apply to anyone expressing approval of abortion. I pointed to the buffer zone sign (listing all the prohibitions) and said if he wanted “to have this conversation on abortion we would have to leave the area. He agreed and we walked out together to talk freely. I asked him what he thought and in response reasoned with him as a scientist on the aspects of human development and the consequences of abortion. But like everyone when they have exhausted all their arguments, he said, “okay, let's agree to disagree”, and left.

This double standard was denounced by American Vice President J.D. Vance in Munich when he said “free speech, I fear, is in retreat” in Britain. Then days before your trial, a representative of the US State Department met with you and four others who have been in crosshairs for breaching buffer zones to talk about your cases. Has it helped your crusade for free speech?

I would say it has because I am extremely busy. Not only did V.P. Vance help by putting

all our cases on the public table, but Providence is also working to keep the conversation on free speech alive. More and more people are coming forward to offer help. One example is a Conference, *Our Churches and Human Rights*, which took place in Bournemouth on 17 May organised by Christian Action Dorset. It was aimed to wake up churches of all denominations by involving them on the crashing of human rights in Britain and was very successful. This September there will be another event with March for Life UK on 6 September again to talk about human rights for all humans. I still get requests for interviews and to give my testimony. Ironically, people are interested in my case but afraid to discuss abortion.

What are they afraid of?

People fear they might be accused of hate speech and possibly reported to the police. The fear was evident when we invited local churches to the conference in Bournemouth. So many people were happy to talk in private but said they were afraid to talk about abortion and human rights publicly. The fact is 1 in 3 women in the UK will have had abortion by the age of 45 making it very possible there will be post-abortive women in any Church congregation. A quarter of a million babies die in abortions every year in Britain and the number continues to increase. Thanks to the last Conservative government women can now obtain abortion pills in the post and without seeing a doctor. There have been cases of men putting abortion pills in pregnant women's drinks without them knowing. It is vital there are public discussions about this. Ironically people want to talk but they don't feel free.

Is this fear linked to the political and cultural power the abortion industry and lobby has gained in the UK?

Yes I think it is. The abortion industry has distorted words. It's like Orwell's 1984 Newspeak. We all know what an abortion is yet it is called healthcare. With the introduction of buffer zones, charitable acts are called harassment, praying in silence is called protest, or in my case offering consensual conversation is intimidation and carry accusations of breaching the law. The abortion lobby has created this fictional image of pro-life supporters who stand near abortion clinics shouting at and harassing pregnant women.

News articles have reported that pro-life supporters have harassed pregnant women using the clinic in Bournemouth. What happened?

It's fake news. In Bournemouth there has not been one single conviction, not even one complaint to the police.

It's curious that all the people who have been accused of breaching a buffer zone are Catholics. Is there something about the Catholic faith that inspires

courageous testimony?

We follow Jesus Christ's message that every person has dignity, is unique, precious, is loved and retains that dignity until the end. Perhaps that message is not so clear in other churches. Speaking to other congregants, they have told me it is right to offer help but that they are in favour of the right to choose. This means they consider a different right more important. In some denominations and some church leaders have lost the sense of how valuable life is and that this was the reason for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In the Anglican Church there are some people who say in some cases abortion is to be advocated while others take a public stand to defend the unborn.

How optimistic are you that the situation will improve?

I am confident there will be a change for the better in the future. Just the absurdity of my sentence makes it a victory. It has shown society that "the enemy is within" as V.P. Vance said. If we don't fight back, our democracy will collapse. Everyone will pay the consequences. That is also why I am going to appeal against my sentence.