

Grassroots for Europe Round Table 21 – Campaign Asks

“Outside-In Perspectives on EU Relations & the State of UK Democracy” “Democracy in Danger”

Responding to the current anti-democratic threat in the UK

This document was prepared in advance of the Pro-European Round Table meeting 21, held on 12/01/2022. It is here revised, incorporating information shared at this meeting and latest news.

See Action Points at page 4.

We gratefully acknowledge the presentations and information shared by our invited speakers:

Seema Syeda - Communications and Campaigns Officer at AEIP

Tom Brake - director of Unlock Democracy (also working closely in this campaign with Best for Britain and Liberty)

Jun Pang - Policy and Campaigns Officer at Liberty

Maria Milova - volunteer in the Young European Network at the3million,

Alex Toal - Alliance & Support Executive, Make Votes Matter (Alex also works with Bylines Network)

Thanks also to

Kathleen Christie FRSA - Civil Society Convener for Police Bill Alliance, Liberty

1. BACKGROUND – THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC THREAT.

At least four important pieces of legislation now before Parliament present major threats to our democracy, civil liberty and human rights:

- **Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill**
- **Elections Bill**
- **Nationality and Borders Bill**
- **Judicial Review and Courts Bill**

The **Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill** will make *many types of protest illegal*, will ban us from marching and demonstrating outside parliament,

and will *increase police powers for stop and search at protests*. Recent amendments included the creation of orders which could *ban any individual the Government chooses from protesting*. Other parts of the bill include clauses which *make 'noisy' protest illegal* and which *clamp down on protest that causes 'unease'* .

If passed, the **Elections Bill** would *remove independent regulation of the elections process* and give government ministers *powers to decide who can participate in elections campaigning*. The **Bill** will *force every UK voter to present ID upon voting*. This will make it harder for those on lower incomes and people of colour to vote, as these groups are less likely to possess an official ID. The Bill also threatens the existing voting rights of EU citizens.

The **Nationality and Borders Bill** will impose *unprecedented restrictions on the lives of asylum seekers and those who help them*. From *criminalising the means by which many asylum seekers enter the UK* to *returning asylum seekers to countries where they might not actually be safe*, the bill will remove many of the protections that those seeking asylum are currently afforded. Other proposed additions to the bill include *making it legal to push back dinghies of refugees* attempting to cross the English Channel and *offshoring asylum seekers to de-facto detention camps* to process their applications. Under a recently added amendment (Clause 9) *individuals could be stripped of their British citizenship without warning*.

The **Judicial Review and Courts Bill** would mean that *parliament could strike out judicial decisions* that it disagreed with and would protect the government of the day from legal consequences for actions the Courts found to be unlawful. Judicial reviews are a vital tool of democracy whereby institutional decisions can be challenged by ordinary citizens. Government ministers are also considering adding amendments to the bill which will *allow them to review and invalidate the outcomes of all judicial review decisions if they so wish*.¹

The document below provides current reference information on these Bills, with other dangerous legislative plans. For each Bill it references organised responses, actions and plans, campaign materials, key commentary and documents.

There are some common and disturbing features of this situation.

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See <https://www.bestforbritain.org/januarycrossroadsdemocracy>

- These laws prolong the virtual state of democratic exception which is supposed to have been mandated by the 2016 referendum. They have all, like much Brexit law, been driven through Parliament with scant regard for the procedural checks and balances of democratic legislation, criticism, challenge and scrutiny.
- Several of them create unprecedented, dangerous and arbitrary executive and police powers over groups and individuals, while the judicial review bill threatens to confiscate citizens' recourse to law to hold power to account.
- All of these changes are meanwhile being legislated at pace with inadequate challenge because, thanks in large part to the distractions, conflicts and scandals of the pandemic, public opinion is largely being kept in a state of ignorance, inert indifference and passivity relating to what the government is attempting to perpetrate.

Over past months, coalitions established to resist specific Bills have accomplished impressive mobilisations of public opinion in adverse circumstances. But maybe they can be further augmented to help meet a common threat. A number of organisations, both specifically pro-European and other, responded positively to our recent letter on this topic.

Pro-EU groups have a strong, and by now experienced activist grassroots which has mobilised near-record mass presence. The anti-democratic threat does not only concern pro-Europeans of course, but pro-European know their cause is lost if we lose our democracy.

Different organisations are focussing effort on different subsets of current legislation. Some organisations are specialised in, designed and tasked to address specific field of campaigning, but we are all adapting to a new challenge which concerns us all. In some cases, sectors of civil society are

becoming engaged in new ways because they identify a new and unprecedented threat.

Combining the skills and resources of different campaigns and movements may help enhance our capabilities to resist excessive power.

Labour's voting intentions in key upcoming Lords debates - remain uncertain but further clarification is promised shortly. This is an issue of major concern.

Peers are now key players in resisting the worst elements of these Bills – different issues in terms of citizen access, because no constituency. Write via one's MP. Several tools and templates are available and listed below for writing about the different Bills.

Some groups have experience and skills in lobbying, briefing and working with parliamentarians – BFB, Unlock Democracy, Liberty. Some minorities, campaigns and even individual campaigners may be the specific targets of laws vindictively intended to impede or silence them – and for that reason have a claim to wider democratic solidarity (“First they came for the socialists...”).

2. ACTION POINTS - What we need to do NOW!

Tom Brake, director of Unlock Democracy recommends *these immediate actions*:

This is the link to our action centre for the **Elections Bill**.

<https://unlockdemocracy.org.uk/electionsbill>

Sign the Petition NOW! -

<https://secure.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/page/82336/petition/1?locale=en-GB>

Write to Your MP -

<https://secure.unlockdemocracy.org.uk/page/89025/action/1?ea.tracking.id=web>

Spread the word on Facebook - Facebook share page for Elections Bill — Unlock Democracy

Other possible actions relating to the Police Bill.

Action: Please continue to share the short protest videos produced by Liberty. They feature a network of influential campaigners, including the Gurkha campaigners, and other groups spanning issues including disability rights, domestic violence and community resources. They serve to highlight that

anyone at all may need to protest at some point, so we're using the hashtag #WeProtest. Thanks to everyone who has already shared the videos on social channels. Please keep sharing them.

The link to resources is [here](#), including 1-minute shorts for use on social.

Action: Please ask any supporters who haven't already done so to **sign the petition**. This has now sharply risen to over 760,000 people and Friends of the Earth are coordinating the hand in at 11am Monday 17th at the Home Office. Active petitions can be found on five websites – [Friends of the Earth](#), [Liberty](#), [SumOfUs](#) and [Global Justice Now](#) and [Greenpeace](#) – please ask your supporters to sign one of them.

The Police Bill Alliance is at <https://policebillalliance.org/> and tweets as [@PoliceBillAll](#).

You can **show your support for the campaign** by using the hashtag **#PolicingBill**

There is from a recent briefing by Kathleen Christie on the Police Bill here: <https://www.acevo.org.uk/2022/01/whats-happening-on-the-policing-bill/>

<< **A mobilisation moment** will take place on **Monday 17 January** to draw attention to the Lords vote. During the day, Police Bill Alliance representatives will hand in the combined petition – currently standing at over 760,000 signatures – to the Home Office. Later in the evening, a **Noisy and Annoying Protest** has been called by the comedian Mark Thomas opposite Parliament, with coordination by **Global Justice Now**.

The lobbying focus will switch to the Commons as we approach ping-pong, with the alliance focussing on target MPs and organisations invited to ask their supporters to write to their MPs with personal stories of the importance of protest to real social change.

We will continue to spotlight **positive demonstrations and protests** on social media, including the **short protest videos produced by Liberty**. They feature a network of influential campaigners, including the Gurkha campaigners, and other groups spanning issues including disability rights, domestic violence and community resources. These videos serve to highlight that anyone at all may need to protest at some point, so we're using the hashtag #WeProtest.

Next stages of influencing...

The House of Lords started its **Part 3 Report Stage** this week, giving all peers a further opportunity to examine the bill and propose further amendments. The final day of Report Stage is on Monday 17 January when the Part 3 vote will take place. We expect Third Reading (when the amendments will be debated

for the final time) to take place at the start of February. Our current analysis is that **ping-pong** (when amendments are passed back and forth between the House of Lords and the House of Commons) will occur either during the week beginning 7 February or the week beginning 21 February. After ping-pong is completed, we will know which elements of the bill will pass into law.

There are **several things you can do to support our work influencing this bill:**

- **Share your concerns with MPs ahead of ping-pong** and encourage them to attend the Commons vote in February by writing to them
- **Convene like-minded organisations in your sector and generate a lobbying letter to Peers**
- **Promote positive stories of demonstrations and protests.**
- **Tag @PoliceBillAll on Twitter** so we can help amplify social media posts
- **Generate an opinion piece** to remind politicians of the breadth of support for scrapping Part 3 and Part 4 ahead of ping-pong >>

Some key dates:

Saturday, January 15th 13:00 UTC **Another Europe Is Possible with Kill**

Kill the Nationality and Police Bills Protest, London, Sat 15, 12pm, Lincoln's Inn Fields, London, WC2A 3.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2092939680862760>

Speakers include John McDonnell MP, Marsha de Cordova, BAME Lawyers 4 Justice, PCS Union & more.

<https://www.facebook.com/events/2092939680862760>

Write to your MP - <https://www.anothereurope.org/defeat-the-anti-refugee-bill/>

Monday, January 17th is an unusually busy parliamentary day involving both the **Commons Report stage of the Elections Bill** and the **Lords Report stage of the Police Bill**.

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Saturday, February 5th 12 noon Rally against the Election Bill with Make Votes Matter, Best for Britain, Unlock Democracy and political parties.

<https://www.makevotesmatter.org.uk/news/5-february-march-for-democracy>

Register here : <https://actionnetwork.org/events/elections-bill-rally>

Other Resources:

Additional info and resources kindly provided by Another Europe is Possible:

- **Nathalie Bennett's Lords Amendment:** <https://twitter.com/fahadansari/status/1480591660413247488?s=21>
- **Model Motion against NABB-National and Borders Bill.**
<https://twitter.com/fahadansari/status/1480591660413247488?s=21>Model
- **44 MSPa Statement against NABB**
<https://www.anothereurope.org/nationality-and-borders-bill-model-motion/MSP>
- **Letter to Keir Starmer** [Letter to Keir Starmer: defend all migrants and refugees – Another Europe is Possible](#)
- **AEIP Conference policy on Europe:** <https://www.anothereurope.org/our-future-relationship-with-the-eu-another-europe-national-conference-2021/>

Oxford for Europe: <https://oxfordforeurope.org/the-police-bill-a-threat-to-civil-liberties/>

A local grassroots group webpage informing its supporters on this issue and inviting them to intervene. Other pro-European groups are welcome to re-use or adapt this material.