

Round Table 22: post-meeting information

Defending Democracy

[Based on verbal updates from Colin Gordon and Tom Brake]

Grassroots for Europe recently issued a media release¹ warning that the Police Bill presents a fundamental threat to our democracy, and has joined the Police Bill Alliance. It has since joined the Police Bill Alliance to campaign alongside other organisations for the major amendment of this Bill.

The current status of the key Bills is:

Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Bill	<i>Ping-pong session, 28 February</i>
Elections Bill	<i>Lords second reading, 23 February</i>
Nationality and Borders Bill	<i>Lords Report stage, 28 February -</i>
Judicial Review and Courts Bill	<i>Lords Committee stage, 21 February -</i>

A well-attended rally against the Elections Bill (and other dangerous current anti-democratic legislation) hosted by make Votes Matter was held in Parliament Square on February 5th. The speakers included Naomi Smith², Gina Miller, Tom Brake and John McDonnell MP.

Tom Brake shared the link to the Unlock Democracy briefing site on the Elections Bill at <https://unlockdemocracy.org.uk/electionsbill>.

¹ <https://westenglandbylines.co.uk/grassroots-for-europe-say-patels-bill-steals-our-rights/>
<https://northeastbylines.co.uk/grassroots-for-europe-says-patels-bill-steals-our-rights/>
<https://westcountryvoices.co.uk/grassroots-for-europe-say-patels-bill-steals-our-rights/>

² <https://www.bestforbritain.org/electionsbillprotestspeech>

For video extracts of speeches see:

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/477031/say-no-to-election-bill-protest-in-parliament-square>

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/477038/speaker-gina-miller-make-votes-matter>

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/477066/speaker-naomi-smith-at-the-make-votes-matter-rally-against-the-electionsbill>

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/477049/speakers-john-mcdonnell-at-the-make-votes-matter-rally-against-the-electionsbill>

<https://www.newsflare.com/video/477070/make-votes-matter>

Briefings are being held to Conservative, cross-party and crossbench peers on the Elections bill and its voter-suppressing, autocratising measures. It is hoped a similar revolt can be achieved in the Lords to that against the Police Bill. There are signs of resistance to measures affecting the autonomy of the Electoral Commission. There are possibilities that amended criteria for voter ID can be agreed which are less discriminatory against young and disadvantaged voters.

On Tuesday January 17th, in a remarkable debate the Lords inflicted heavy defeats on the government in all 14 votes on the Bill. This included the defeat of all amendments introduced by the government without debate in the Commons – these cannot now be reintroduced. There remains a risk the Commons will reverse other amendments passed in the Lords.

Liberty commented:

Votes in the House of Lords last night mean that these threats to protest are defeated and cannot be returned to the Bill:

- The offence of locking on and being equipped to lock on.
- Interference with major transport works.
- Interference of key national infrastructure.
- Stop and search on specifically for items associated with other parts of the Bill, such as causing “nuisance”.
- Suspicionless stop and search related to protest.
- Serious Disruption Prevention Orders (protest banning orders)

[However these measures could be reintroduced through a new Bill.]

More info: **5 ways the Government’s Policing Bill just went from bad to worse**
These threats to protest were defeated but MPs must defeat them again to ensure they do not become law:

- Creating a ‘buffer zone’ around Parliament.
- Giving police power to impose noise-based restrictions on protest.
- Criminalising one-person protests.
- Giving police power to impose restrictions on public assemblies.
- Creating the offence of wilful obstruction of the highway (amended to only include the Strategic Road Network).

Powers to criminalise trespass, which threaten the way of life of Gypsy and Traveller communities, were already passed by the House of Lords, meaning MPs must defeat them or scrap the Bill wholesale. New police powers, which will entrench the danger of police interactions, particularly for Black men **and survivors of domestic abuse** and criminal exploitation, were amended so that there must be a robust pilot and a parliamentary vote before their roll out. MPs can still vote to block the serious violence duty and Serious Violence Reduction Orders in their entirety if they oppose the Bill.

Organisations in the Alliance (including Grassroots for Europe) are asking local

campaigners in relevant constituencies to right to a selected set of influential and potential rebel Tory MPs.

Where possible at local level, citizens from different campaigns and communities will combine through joint letters to MPs, letters to local media and joint approaches to their MPs.

GfE have contacted local group chair who are helping with this, and coordinating with other Alliance members.

Campaigners are encouraged to send this updated briefing to their MP:

<https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Joint-Briefing-on-Pt.-3-PCSCB-Ping-Pong-February-2022.pdf>

Best for Britain has confirmed its intention to campaign strongly in favour of the amendments safeguarding the right to protest in Parliament Square.

Grassroot for Europe endorses this position.

The 'ping-pong' session' on the Police Bill [consideration by Commons of Lords amendments] is on **Monday 28th February**, with 6 hours allocated for discussion and debate.

The Lords second reading of the Elections Bill is on February 23rd. Further campaign action news is expected shortly.

Further detailed and updated information about the current Bills and forthcoming legislation is available in the accompanying document from Grassroot for Europe.