

Licence to Kill: new US laws target radical protest - In states whose legislatures have Republican majorities or Republican governors

Saturday 1 May 2021, by [COOPER Alan](#) (Date first published: 29 April 2021).

On the brink of the Kill the Bill day of action in Britain this Saturday, Alan Cooper reports on the growing attacks on democracy across the US. Is this the direction of travel here too?

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US states Oklahoma and Iowa have passed laws that grant immunity to drivers who cause injuries by driving into street protests. This is part of a wave of anti-protest laws passed or being discussed in states whose legislatures have Republican majorities or Republican governors.

In Oklahoma and Iowa, fascists and other reactionaries now have *carte blanche* to drive into anti-racist and other protests. All they have to do is claim they were acting in self-defence. These new laws are particularly shocking in the light of the 2017 Charlottesville murder of anti-racist protestor Heather Heyer by self-described neo-Nazi James Alex Fields. He drove his car full-pelt into anti-racist protestors who had gone to the city to protest a national assembly of Nazi, Ku Klux Klan, and other armed white-racist gangs. In the wake of her murder, Donald Trump notoriously said there were 'good people on both sides'.

According to the *New York Times*, the bill in Oklahoma was prompted by events in Tulsa in June 2020, when a fascist drove his pick-up truck into anti-racist protestors:

Last June, a pick-up truck carrying a horse trailer drove through a crowd of Black Lives Matter protesters on a Tulsa freeway, injuring several people and leaving one paralysed. The driver, who said he had sped up because he feared for the safety of his family, was not charged.

The bill's author, State Senator Rob Standridge, said the Tulsa incident had prompted him to seek immunity for drivers who strike protestors. He said Tuesday he wasn't aware of any drivers who had been charged after striking protestors in Oklahoma. 'My hope is that this law never is utilised.' [1]

This anti-democratic wave comes in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests last year, and shows the continued strength of the radical right in the Republican Party and the widespread sympathy for fascist groups outside it. Trump may have gone, but creeping fascism marches on. Extreme-right activists used social media to claim Fields was 'acting in self-defence'.

Eighty-four anti-protest measures are being discussed in 31 states. In Florida, Republican governor

Ron de Santos has just signed into law a new anti-disorder bill that redefines riots and the penalties for them. A riot can be defined as three people (!) who are creating public disorder or provoking it. Riot moves from a misdemeanour to a felony, and this is a 'Felony 3' crime, with a maximum penalty of five years in prison or a \$5,000 fine. The same crime involving 25 or more people is a 'Felony 2' crime, with a maximum sentence of 15 years or a \$50,000 fine.

In Minnesota and Indiana, measures are being proposed to bar convicted protestors from student loans, employment in public services, unemployment benefit, or state-provided mortgages. In other words, measures intended to creating a chilling effect on anyone who wants to participate in a demonstration, since they thereby risk penalties that could severely damage their income or life and employment chances.

Is America still a democracy?

Does free speech exist in America? It depends what you mean. In many states, the now highly militarised police have wide powers to declare your protest unlawful and threaten you with severe penalties. Florida state governor Ron de Santos was absolutely open about it. 'We will not allow Florida to become another Seattle,' he said, referring to the prolonged Black Lives Matter demonstrations there following the murder in George Floyd in Minneapolis in June 2020 by racist cop Derek Chauvin.

As the scope of the anti-protest law was becoming clear, three cops were fired in Wilmington, North Carolina, after having their in-car conversation recorded, in which they said they were preparing for race war, that it was inevitable, and 'bring it on'. One said he was going to buy an assault rifle.

The political conclusion of these events is clear. The extreme right in the United States has not given up the fight, and the 6 January events at the Capitol building, a virtual attempted insurrection, was not the end of the Far Right or the broad current from conservatives to fascists that supported Donald Trump.

This current continues to exist in the Republican Party and at state and local level. It continues to exist in the many far-right organisations. It continues to exist in the National Rifle Association. It continues to exist among the 74 million people who voted for Donald Trump in November 2020.

The ideology that ties all these people together is racism - anti-Black racism in the first place, but also anti-Latino racism, anti-immigrant racism in general, anti-Arab/Islamic racism, and among many on the American Right a now open, now hidden anti-Semitism.

This ideology is decked out with hyper-masculinity which pits the whole of the Far Right against women's equality and women's rights, in particular the right to abortion. In the very same state legislatures that are considering anti-protest bills, new laws restricting abortion rights have already passed or are planned. And of course the fascists and Far Right are completely hostile to the #MeToo movement against rape and sexual harassment.

All out for democracy this Saturday

Members of Anti*Capitalist Resistance have talked about the onset of a Global Police State, an international process of militarisation of policing, politics, and production, a term coined by William I Robinson, who teaches at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Unfortunately, his predictions are being realised apace.

Against creeping fascism and a global police state, the fight for democracy and the right to protest is vital – not least in Britain, with the fight against the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill. A major series of local demonstrations against the Bill takes place this weekend.

Alan Cooper

Join the demos. The one's we know about so far include:

London: Trafalgar Square, 12 noon

Birmingham: Victoria Square, 11am

Brighton: The Level, 1pm

Bristol: Castle Park, 12 noon and College Green, 6pm

Cambridge: Parkers Piece, opposite Police Station, 1pm

Chatham: top of Church St, 11.30am

Chichester: Priory Park, 12 noon

Coventry: Broadgate, 1pm

Eastbourne Hyde Gardens 1pm

Edinburgh: The Pavilion Café, 3.30pm

Exeter: Bedford Square, 1pm

Harlow: Town Park, showground, 2pm

Hastings: Cornwallis Gardens, 12 noon

Lancaster: Dalton Square, 11.30am

Leamington: Pump Room Gardens, 1pm

Leeds: Woodhouse Moor, 3pm

Liverpool: Derby Square, 12 noon

Lowestoft: opposite WH Smith, 12 noon

Manchester: St Peter's Square, 4pm

Middlesbrough: Centre Square, 1pm

Newcastle: Grey's Monument, 1pm

Northampton: Cobblers Last Statue, town centre, 1pm

Norwich: City Hall, 1pm

Nottingham: Pavilion on Forest Recreation Ground, 12 noon

Oxford: Manzil Way Green, 3pm

Portsmouth: Guildhall Square, 12 noon

Sheffield: Devonshire Green, 1pm

Southampton: Bargate, 12 noon

Southend: top of Pier Hill, 1.30pm

Stoke: outside Hanley bus station, 1pm

Tower Hamlets: Bethnal Green Gardens, 10.30am rally, before attending Central London demo

Truro: Lemon Quay, 2pm

Winchester: Police Station, top of High Street, 12 noon

York: Minster, 1pm

Chesterfield: Shentall Gardens, 11am, Monday 3 May

P.S.

- Anti*Capitalist Resistance. 29 April 2021:
<https://www.anticapitalistresistance.org/post/licence-to-kill-new-us-laws-target-radical-protest>

Footnotes

[1] [1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/21/us/politics/republican-anti-protest-laws.html>