

# Britain: From Day of Action to Pro-Democracy Movement?

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**Neil Faulkner discusses strategy and tactics for the democracy struggle.**

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With protests in around 50 towns and cities across Britain, often a thousand or more strong, the Kill the Bill campaign has momentum. The main London demo involved at least 10,000. Overwhelmingly young and very diverse, it was led by black and white women.

But this can only be the beginning if we are to defeat the bill. Demos of 10,000 will not stop the Tory drive towards a police state. Though stalled by the protests over the last three weeks, the Tory plan is almost certainly for the bill to resume its passage through Parliament once the current round of protest has died down. They have a long-term agenda. They will not give up easily.

The Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts bill is a crucial plank in the architecture of an emerging police state. It would allow the police to declare any planned protest illegal, exposing organisers and participants to arrests, fines, even imprisonment.

This will include any kind of effective protest – ‘disruptive’ in Tory-speak. Occupying a library to prevent its closure. Preventing bailiffs carrying out an eviction. Blockading a fast-food joint in solidarity with striking workers. Blocking a bridge to protest carbon pollution. Holding an open-air rally outside Parliament. Marching on the City against sweatshop profiteering. Disrupting an arms fair. Anything and everything deemed ‘disruptive’ of the corporate machine, the carbon machine, or the military machine. It is to be ‘business as usual’ for capitalism, with the occasional A-to-B march on a prescribed route before a police order to disperse as liberal window-dressing.

But the bill is only one part of a wider, long-term attack. It includes the anti-union laws first passed under Thatcher in the 1980s, which make it illegal for any union to back spontaneous action by members. It includes the escalating levels of state surveillance, from cameras on every street corner to industrial-scale spying on mobile phone and internet traffic. It includes the growing militarisation and violence of the police.

This is a global trend. The attack on democracy extends all the way from the Chinese dictatorship’s Uighur concentration camps and suppression of Hong Kong’s pro-democracy movement to Donald Trump’s border wall, mass incarceration of migrants, and violent police crackdown on BLM protestors. Democracy the world over is under attack by authoritarian regimes and militarised police.

## **The rise of the neoliberal police state**

Why is this? Why this shift from the more consensual forms of politics that predominant half a century ago to increasing state repression today?

There are two main reasons. The first is the collapse in trade-union power and in the mass, reformist, social-democratic politics that was based upon it. Democracy, in the end, depends upon powerful organisations of the majority – of the working class and the oppressed – able to advance and defend democratic freedoms.

No ruling class ever grants democracy as a favour. Freedom is never given: it has to be taken. When working people organise, mobilise, and fight, they can win the right to strike, to meet, to publish, to vote, to have a voice, to create a space for self-expression and self-activity.

But this is a threat to the rich and the corporations. They are few and we are many. The more democracy there is, the stronger the working class and the oppressed become. So the struggle over democracy continues just so long as class society exists: they are always trying to restrict it, we are always fighting to enlarge it. They are on the offensive now, seeking to shut down democracy, to create police states, because they feel they have the power to do so.

But there is a second factor. The capitalist system means an escalating social and ecological crisis. Billions of people are affected by the consequences – unemployment, bullshit jobs, poverty pay, unaffordable housing, rising prices, cuts in benefits and pensions, hospital waiting lists, student fees, lack of social care, male violence, police racism, homophobia and transphobia, and so much more. Life just keeps getting worse for the overwhelming majority of humanity.

This means explosions of revolt from below. Since the banking crash in 2008, we have seen one uprising after another, in city after city, from country to country, right across the world. In the last couple of years alone, we have seen pro-democracy movements in Hong Kong, Belarus, and Myanmar, feminist movements in Poland, Argentina, and Mexico, global school strikes and direct action against carbon pollution, and a movement against police racism starting in the United States that spread across the world.

These mass uprisings contain the seeds of a mortal threat to the entire capitalist social order, with its rape of the planet, its devastation of human communities, its ruthless dynamic of plunder and exploitation in the interests of a tiny class of super-rich. The system is being destabilised by its own social and ecological destructiveness.

So the world is increasingly polarised. On the one hand, the super-rich and corporations are protected by a corrupt political class, by increasingly militarised police, by repressive laws, by a compliant mass media. On the other, there are repeated eruptions of protest and resistance that could begin to fuse into a global movement for revolutionary change.

## **The fight of our lives**

We should not delude ourselves. There will be no easy victories. We are fighting a political class wedded to corporate power and state repression. We face the militarised police of the capitalist state. We threaten the interests of the 1%, the corporate rich, the lords of capital, the people whose wealth and power the state exists to protect.

It is going to take more than a week or two of medium-sized demos, however idealistic, militant, and

determined the young protestors in the vanguard. We are going to have to draw wider forces into the battle, the mass forces of the working class and the oppressed. We are going to need to turn tens of thousands into hundreds of thousands. We are going to need numbers capable of defeating the police, taking over the streets, and shutting down cities, if we are serious about stopping the bill, smashing the embryonic police state, and opening a much wider space for democratic mobilisation and resistance.

We need a campaign that prepares for the following:

- Maximum unity of the largest possible number of activists, organisations, and protestors prepared to fight for democracy.
- A long-term perspective, in anticipation of a struggle likely to last for years and that must aim to defeat all forms of state authoritarianism.
- An internationalist perspective, with the intention of forging links with the struggle for democracy everywhere.
- An all-out fight, with no compromises, no backing down, no compliance with unjust laws and police diktat.

**Neil Faulkner**

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**P.S.**

- Democracy unchained. April 5, 2021:  
<https://democracy-unchained.org/2021/04/05/from-day-of-action-to-pro-democracy-movement/>
- Neil Faulkner is joint author of *Creeping Fascism* and *System Crash*. He will be speaking with Bristol activist Josh Connor at the Democracy Unchained event, *The Battle for Democracy: Frontline Bristol*, 18.30, Thursday 8 April, on Zoom.