

The Riot Act

British Parliament

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***** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE RIOT ACT *****

Produced by Jonathan Walther.

Full text of the Riot Act (c. 1714 - 1715)

Typed in this February 8, 2002 by Jonathan Walther. The source was cap V, volume XIII, pages 142-146 of the "Statutes At Large" series, printed in the year 1764. Also indexed as "Anno primo GEORGEII I. Stat. 2. C. 5." Many sources on the Internet claim the Riot Act was passed in 1715; according to Statutes At Large it was passed in 1714. The confusion may be caused by the fact that the Act took effect in August of 1715. This is, of course, the famous Riot Act that gave rise to the expression "Read them the Riot Act!".

CAP. V.

An act for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies, and for the more speedy and effectual punishing the rioters.

I.

Whereas of late many rebellious riots and tumults have been in divers parts of this kingdom, to the disturbance of the publick peace, and the endangering of his Majesty's person and government, and the same are yet continued and fomented by persons disaffected to his Majesty, presuming so to do, for that the punishments provided by the laws now in being are not adequate to such heinous offences; and by such rioters his Majesty and his administration have been most maliciously and falsly traduced, with an intent to raise divisions, and to alienate the affections of the people from his Majesty therefore for the preventing and suppressing of such riots and tumults, and for the more speedy and effectual punishing the offenders therein; be it enacted by the King's most excellent majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal and of the commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, That if any persons to the number of twelve or more, being unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace, at any time after the last day of July in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and fifteen, and being required or commanded by any one or more justice or justices of the peace, or by the sheriff of the county, or his under-sheriff, or by the mayor, bailiff or bailiffs, or other head-officer, or justice of the peace of any city or town corporate, where such assembly shall be, by proclamation to be made in the King's name, in the form herin after directed, to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, shall, to the number of twelve or more (notwithstanding such proclamation made) unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously remain or continue together by the space of one hour after such command or request made by proclamation, that then such continuing together to the number of twelve or more, after such command or request made by proclamation, shall be adjudged felony without benefit of clergy, and the offenders therein shall be adjudged felons, and shall suffer death as in a case of felony without benefit of clergy.

II.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the order and form of the proclamation that shall be made by the authority of this act, shall be as hereafter followeth (that is to say) the justice of the peace, or other person authorized by this act to make the said proclamation shall, among the said rioters, or as near to them as he can safely come, with a loud voice command, or cause to be commanded silence to be, while proclamation is making, and after that, shall openly and with loud voice make or cause to be made proclamation in these words, or like in effect:

Our sovereign Lord the King chargeth and commandeth all persons, being assembled, immediately to disperse themselves, and peaceably to depart to their habitations, or to their lawful business, upon the pains contained in the act made in the first year of King George, for preventing tumults and riotous assemblies. God save the King.

And every such justice and justices of the peace, sheriff, under-sheriff, mayor, bailiff, and other head-officer aforesaid, within the limits of their respective jurisdictions, are hereby authorized, impowered and required, on notice or knowledge of any such unlawful, riotous and tumultuous assembly, to resort to the place where such unlawful, riotous, and tumultuous assemblies shall be, of persons to the number of twelve or more, and there to make or cause to be made proclamation in manner aforesaid.

III.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if such persons so unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously assembled, or twelve or more of them, after proclamation made in manner aforesaid, shall continue together and not disperse themselves within one hour, That then it shall and may be lawful to and for every justice of the peace, sheriff, or under-sheriff of the county where such assembly shall be, and also to and for every high or petty constable, and other peace-officer within such county, and also to and for every mayor, justice of the peace, sheriff, bailiff, and other head-officer, high or petty constable, and other peace-officer of any city or town corporate where such assembly shall be, and to and for such other person and persons as shall be commanded to be assisting unto any such justice of the peace, sheriff or under-sheriff, mayor, bailiff, or other head-officer aforesaid (who are hereby authorized and empowered to command all his Majesty's subjects of age and ability to be assisting to them therein) to seize and apprehend, and they are hereby required to seize and apprehend such persons so unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously continuing together after proclamation made, as aforesaid, and forthwith to carry the persons so apprehended before one or more of his Majesty's justices of the peace of the county or place where such persons shall be so apprehended, in order to their being proceeded against for such their offences according to law; and that if the persons so unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled, or any of them, shall happen to be killed, maimed or hurt, in the dispersing, seizing or apprehending, or endeavouring to disperse, seize or apprehend them, that then every such justice of the peace, sheriff, under-sheriff, mayor, bailiff, head-officer, high or petty constable, or other peace-officer, and all and singular persons, being aiding and assisting to them, or any of them, shall be free, discharged and indemnified, as well against the King's Majesty, his heirs and successors, as against all and every other person and persons, of, for, or concerning the killing, maiming, or hurting of any such person or persons so unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled, that shall happen to be so killed, maimed or hurt, as aforesaid.

IV.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any persons unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace, shall unlawfully, and with force demolish or pull down, or begin to demolish or pull down any church or chapel, or any building for religious worship certified and registred according to the statute made in the first year of the reign of the late King William and Queen Mary, intituled, An act for exempting their Majesty's protestant subjects dissenting from the church of England from the penalties of certain laws, or any dwelling-house, barn, stable, or other out-house, that then every such demolishing, or pulling down, or beginning to demolish, or pull down, shall be adjudged felony without benefit of clergy, and the offenders therein shall be adjudged felons, and shall suffer death as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.

V.

Provided always, and be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any person or persons do, or shall, with force and arms, wilfully and knowingly oppose, obstruct, or in any manner wilfully and knowingly lett, hinder, or hurt any person or persons that shall begin to proclaim, or go to proclaim according to the proclamation hereby directed to be made, whereby such proclamation shall not be made, that then every such apposing, obstructing, letting, hindering or hurting such person or persons, so beginning or going to make such proclamation, as aforesaid, shall be adjudged felony without benefit of clergy, and the offenders therein shall be adjudged felons, and shall suffer death as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy; and that also every such person or persons so being unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled, to the number of twelve, as aforesaid, or more, to whom proclamation should or ought to have been made if the same had not been hindred, as aforesaid, shall likewise, in case they or any of them, to the number of twelve or more, shall continue together, and not disperse themselves within one hour after such lett or hindrance so made, having knowledge of such lett or hindrance so made, shall be adjudged felons, and shall suffer death as in case of felony, without benefit of clergy.

VI.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if after the said last day of July one thousand seven hundred and fifteen, any such church or chapel, or any such building for religious worship, or any such dwelling-house, barn, stable, or other out-house, shall be demolished or pulled down wholly, or in part, by any persons so unlawfully, riotously and tumultuously assembled,

that then, in case such church, chapel, building for religious worship, dwelling-house, barn, stable, or out-house, shall be out of any city or town, that is either a county of itself, or is not within any hundred, that then the inhabitants of the hundred in which such damage shall be done, shall be liable to yield damages to the person or persons injured and damnified by such demolishing or pulling down wholly or in part; and such damages shall and may be recovered by action to be brought in any of his Majesty's courts of record at Westminster, (wherein no effoin, protection or wager of law, or any imparlance shall be allowed) by the person or persons damnified thereby, against any two or more of the inhabitants of such hundred, such action for damages to any church or chapel to be brought in the name of the rector, vicar or curate of such church or chapel that shall be so damnified, in trust for applying the damages to be recovered in rebuilding or repairing such church or chapel; and that judgment being given for the plaintiff or plaintiffs in such action, the damages so to be recovered shall, at the request of such plaintiff or plaintiffs, his or their executors or administrators, be raised and levied on the inhabitants of such hundred, and paid to such plaintiff or plaintiffs, in such manner and form, and by such ways and means, as are provided by the statute made in the seven and twentieth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, for reimbursing the person or persons on whom any money recovered against any hundred by any party robbed, shall be levied: and in case any such church, chapel, building for religious worship, dwelling-house, barn, stable, or out-house so damnified, shall be in any city or town that is either a county of itself, or is not within any hundred, that then such damages shall and may be recovered by action to be brought in manner aforesaid (where no effoin, protection or wager of law, or any imparlance shall be allowed) against two or more inhabitants of such city or town; and judgment being given for the plaintiff or plaintiffs in such action, the damages so to be recovered shall, at the request of such plaintiff or plaintiffs, his or their executors or administrators, made to the justices of the peace of such city or town at any quarter-sessions to be holden for the said city or town, be raised and levied on the inhabitants of such city or town, and paid to such plaintiff or plaintiffs, in such manner and form, and by such ways and means, as are provided by the said statute made in the seven and twentieth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, for reimbursing the person or persons on whom any money recovered against any hundred by any party robbed, shall be levied.

VII.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That this act shall be openly read at every quarter-session, and at every leet or law-day.

VIII.

Provided always, That no person or persons shall be prosecuted by virtue of this act, for any offence or offences committed contrary to the same, unless such prosecution be commenced within twelve months after the offence committed.

IX.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the sheriffs and their deputies, stewards and their deputies, bailies of regalities and their deputies, magistrates of royal boroughs, and all other inferior judges and magistrates, and also all high and petty constables, or other peace-officers of any county, stewartry, city or town, within that part of Great Britain called Scotland, shall have the same powers and authority for putting this present act in execution within Scotland, as the justices of the peace and other magistrates aforesaid, respectively have by virtue of this act, within and for the other parts of this kingdom; and that all and every person and persons who shall at any time be convicted of any the offences aforementioned, within that part of Great Britain called Scotland, shall for every such offence incur and suffer the pain of death, and confiscation of moveables: and also that all prosecutions for repairing the damages of any church or chapel, or any building for religious worship, or any dwelling-house, barn, stable or out-house, which shall be demolished or pulled down in whole or in part, within Scotland, by any persons unlawfully, riotously or tumultuously assembled, shall and may be recovered by summar action, at the instance of the party aggrieved, his or her heirs or executors, against the county, stewartry, city or borough respectively, where such disorders shall happen, the magistrates being summoned in the ordinary form, and the several counties and stewartries called by edictal citation at the market-cross of the head borough of such county or stewartry respectively, and that in general, without mentioning their names and designations.

X.

Provided, and it is hereby declared, That this act shall extend to all places for religious worship, in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, which are tolerated by law, and where his majesty King George, the prince and princess of Wales, and their issue, are prayed for in express words.

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