

Louisiana Governor Jeff Landry signs law requiring display of Ten Commandments in classrooms

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Last week, Louisiana Republican Governor Jeff Landry signed into law a fascistic bill requiring public schools in the state to display in every classroom the Ten Commandments, laws supposedly given by God to Moses, as recorded in the Old Testament portion of the Bible. They remain a central feature of Christian and Jewish religious practices.

This is a flagrant violation of the First Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibits Congress from enacting any law that would establish a state religion. The First Amendment was applied to all state governments by the 14th Amendment, one of three adopted in the wake of the American Civil War.

The state of Louisiana was only admitted back into the Union, following secession, after its state legislature formally ratified the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, abolishing slavery, incorporating the Bill of Rights for all citizens of every race, and recognizing, at least formally, the right to vote for all citizens.

In an effort to pretend that the new state law recognizes the Biblical laws not as a religious doctrine but as a historical precursor to the Constitution, the Louisiana law requires the Ten Commandments to be displayed along with a few paragraphs of text claiming the Commandments were foundational to the establishment of the United States.

Governor Landry stated while signing the bill saying, “If you want to respect the rule of law you’ve got to start from the original law giver, which was Moses.” These words hardly disguise the real driving force behind the new law, which is the demand by Christian fundamentalist groups that separation of church and state should be overthrown, and religion made the basis of all public policy.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

announced within hours of the signing that it will be suing the state government for violation of constitutional protections against the establishment of a particular religion by the United States. Within days, the lawsuit was filed in the US District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana, alleging that the law is “blatantly unconstitutional” and “substantially interferes with and burdens” the constitutional right to religious freedom.

Ex-president Donald Trump, who recently visited New Orleans and was accompanied by Landry at a high-dollar fund-raising party, spoke out in favor of the law on his Truth Social platform: “I LOVE THE TEN COMMANDMENTS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.” Trump continued, “THIS MAY BE, IN FACT, THE FIRST MAJOR STEP IN THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION, WHICH IS DESPERATELY NEEDED, IN OUR COUNTRY.”

Trump’s “love” for religion and the Ten Commandments is, of course, dubious and cynical in the extreme. Any reader can easily verify that Trump regularly violates at least eight of the ten commandments on a regular basis, given that he worships himself and engages in theft, covetousness and other supposedly sinful activities.

The 78-year-old’s parents are long deceased, having left him an initial fortune of tens if not hundreds of millions of dollars, so he can’t be accused of failing to “honor thy father and thy mother.”

As for prohibition of murder (either the fifth or sixth commandment, depending on the religion), Trump may have obeyed it since leaving the White House, simply for lack of opportunity. But every US president, as “commander in chief,” violates that commandment constantly.

And Trump himself, in one of his more notorious

statements during his 2016 campaign, boasted, “I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose voters.” Evidently, he had concluded that the Old Testament deity was not on the registration rolls.

The Ten Commandments law is one among many reactionary proposals from the right-wing Governor Landry, who in recent months has also sought to rewrite the state constitution and eviscerate the free speech rights of anti-genocide protesters on college campuses.

A proposed convention to rewrite the state constitution, detailed by Landry in recent statements, would address what he perceives as shortcomings in the existing document.

“It will make Louisiana competitive,” Landry said during a press conference. “This is about giving the Legislature the tools to address the problems we know are coming and the opportunity to make changes the people of state are demanding and waiting for,” describing the goal as “reorganizing” rather than “rewriting” the state constitution. According to Landry, the document, which was last revised in 1974, is outdated and ill-suited to meet the needs and challenges of the state.

Central to Landry’s agenda is a call for greater decentralization of power, affecting how Louisiana residents will receive education, healthcare, and vital social infrastructure for generations to come. These changes will make it easier for local politicians to expand reactionary, anti-democratic policies and consolidate power in a handful of top government officials.

In yet another blatant move towards authoritarianism, a new state bill recently passed into law, House Bill 173, would enforce a 25-foot “buffer zone” around police operations, making it illegal to view or approach police forces, restricting the ability to expose police violence with potentially drastic consequences for residents’ right to assembly and protest. “This is needed for the protection of officers,” said Rep. Bryan Fontenot, author of the bill.

Another proposal would make it illegal for pedestrians to block public streets, which, taken together with the buffer zone law, would essentially outlaw all public protests in the state, with harsh penalties for violators, a blatant violation of basic First Amendment rights.

The Louisiana ACLU released a statement condemning the bill. “The twenty-five-foot buffer legislation fundamentally seeks to curtail Louisianians’ ability to hold police accountable for violence and misconduct. If law enforcement officers were operating in a manner that safeguarded the well-being and constitutional rights of the

public, there should be no objection to being observed. Moreover, HB 173 is impractical to enforce consistently and will exacerbate tensions in any situation involving law enforcement. We denounce the passage and signing of this legislation and urge our communities to stay vigilant and safe in response to these developments.”

These new laws would also target highway obstruction and make it easier to lump together arrested protesters under the same law, similar to laws prosecuting organized crime. By using Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statutes, the state can corral residents exercising their rights to protest and charge them in a kangaroo court with minimal defense.

Considering widespread public outcry against the ongoing US-NATO-backed genocide in Gaza, this represents a dangerous precedent for further police-state crackdowns on protests. Under the law, protesters and protest organizers could be rounded up and charged together, facing up to 50 years in prison.

Amidst an increasing political and economic crisis, state governments across the US are putting forward deeper attacks on democratic rights and norms. Similar bills have gone forward in Arizona and Indiana. The ruling class must strike down traditional constitutional rights in order to crack down on anti-war sentiments, as US imperialism plunges forward into one bloody battlefield after another, now with the possible use of nuclear weapons in the US-NATO war in Ukraine against Russia and Washington’s war drive against China.



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