

UK government, Met Police and right-wing media launch witch-hunt against protesters of Israeli genocide

Robert Stevens
14 November 2023

The Metropolitan Police, backed by the Conservative government and right-wing media, have channelled their ongoing offensive against protests demanding a ceasefire in Gaza into a McCarthyite witch-hunt targeting particular protesters.

The media has been filled with images of two individuals carrying placards. They were on the protest at Saturday's mass demonstration in London of 800,000 people.

One, equating the actions of the Israel government with the Nazis, showed the Star of David intertwined with a swastika with the words, "No British politician should be a 'friend of Israel'".

The other homemade placard included a drawing of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and then Home Secretary Suella Braverman as coconuts. This reference to their being "white on the inside" is being treated as a prosecutable "hate crime" against two warmongers who tried to ban the demonstration.

The two protesters were among six people identified by their photos by the Met with the threat, "We're investigating the person in this photo in relation to a hate crime that took place today".

The post on X/Twitter appealed to "anyone who can help us identify them" to contact the police. The threads in the case of the two people holding the placards have been viewed over 14 million and 16 million times respectively.

Separately, police are reported to be hunting two men who scaled Sheffield Town Hall and pulled down an Israeli flag during a pro-Palestine rally, also for a supposed "hate crime."

There is nothing to do with "hate" or criminal activity involved in the banners depicted by the Met. The two

women carrying them, already identified by the media, as Marieha Mohsin Hussain and Kate Varnfield, must and will be resolutely defended.

In fact, a huge majority of those marching in London and other cities, as well as millions around the world, would entirely agree with likening the actions of the Netanyahu regime to those of the Nazis. The Israeli government is carrying out the destruction and expulsion of the Palestinian people in Gaza, killing thousands every week.

At the end of October, as Israel's onslaught on Gaza intensified, Craig Mokhiber resigned his position as director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, stating, "This is a textbook case of genocide."

Mokhiber noted, "The European, ethno-nationalist, settler colonial project in Palestine has entered its final phase, toward the expedited destruction of the last remnants of indigenous Palestinian life in Palestine. What's more, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and much of Europe, are wholly complicit in the horrific assault."

The week leading up to last Saturday's protest was dominated by Braverman's attack on the Met for not banning what she slandered as "hate marches". Met Commissioner Mark Rowley made clear that he could not do so under existing legislation, but that he was nevertheless committed to a dramatic escalation in the number of arrests of demonstrators.

Within hours of the protest ending, a Met statement read, "There were... a number of serious offences identified in relation to hate crime and possible support for proscribed organisations during the protest that we are actively investigating," adding, "We will soon

publish images of some of those we suspect have committed these offences and as we have shown in recent weeks, we will pursue all available lines of enquiry to identify suspects and take action even after the conclusion of protests.”

The Met was backed by Sunak who declared, “The fear and intimidation the Jewish community have experienced over the weekend is deplorable. All criminality must be met with the full and swift force of the law.”

The reality of that day was that Braverman’s statement gave a green light to a few hundred fascists to try and demonstrate at the Cenotaph war memorial on Armistice Day and then attack sections of the march.

Braverman had written in the *Times* four days before the events that football fans had disproportionately suffered at the hands of the police; the majority of far-right thugs who attacked the police were members of hooligan football “firms”. Footage taken by anti-war protesters at Waterloo station shows a group of far-right thugs—including one wearing an Arsenal Football Club shirt, threatening and jostling them. One of the ringleaders, identified online within hours as Kevin Sweeney, is a supporter of Chelsea Football Club. He is seen in video footage repeatedly approaching and saying—within inches of the face of the anti-war protester filming the assault— that he is “terrorist c**t”.

Three of the four have now been arrested by British Transport Police over “a racially aggravated altercation.”

Not only are peaceful protesters opposing genocide being compared with such thugs, the banner headlines demonising the anti-war protesters are used to downplay the fact that the vast majority of the more than 140 arrests made by the police over the weekend were of the fascist rabble.

The *Times*, in its online report headlined, “Teacher sought by police over coconut poster at pro-Palestinian march”, included 89 words on events at Waterloo Station tagged on as an afterthought.

The Met’s main complaint Saturday was that Braverman’s encouragement of the far right had prevented the police from targeting anti-war protesters. Assistant Commissioner Matt Twist wrote Saturday evening, “Locating and intercepting suspects in a crowd of the size we saw today will always be challenging, but we were further limited in our ability

to do so due to the number of officers we had to deploy, from early in the day, in response to violence from the right wing groups in central London.”

The witch-hunt is confirmation of a lurch by the government and the state even further to the right following Braverman’s resignation.

After sacking Braverman for challenging his authority and criticising the police, Sunak let it be known that this did not signify any disagreement with the need to repress popular opposition. On Monday, the *Sun* tabloid was among several newspapers reporting plans sent to them from Sunak’s office for a crackdown on protests.

This would see, “The threshold at which cops can ban marches and protests due to safety concerns lowered; The law on glorifying terrorists like Hamas is also to be tightened as cops say it is too vague to enforce currently.” Furthermore, “Ministers are also looking at ways to restrict certain chants like ‘from the river to the sea’ made at protests by working with organisers to set conditions for approving demonstrations.”

The paper added as supposed justification for these repressive measures, “The clampdown being looked at in Downing Street comes after a day of hate in central London and weeks of pro-Palestine protests were mired with anti-Semitic posters and chants.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact