

More left-wing groups targeted by Britain's pro-Israel police dragnet

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7 February 2024

Police raided the home of a student from University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) last week, arresting her under the Terrorism Act for protesting in defence of the October 7 Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation.

Seven police raided the student's flat at 7am on January 31, seizing items from her home including a phone and laptop. Police told the student, a supporter of SOAS Fight Racism Fight Imperialism (affiliated to the pro-Stalinist Revolutionary Communist Group) that she was being arrested for her speech at a protest on campus in October.

On Friday, the RCG issued a statement confirming the student was arrested "for allegedly 'expressing support for a proscribed organisation' under Section 12 of the Terrorism Act 2000." She was held at Hammersmith police station for eight hours where she was questioned by police with her lawyer present. She was released on bail without charge but is the subject of an ongoing Section 12 counter-terrorism investigation. The RCG has stated it will "strenuously contest" any charges in court.

The dawn raid and arrest of a student under anti-terror laws is an ominous development. On October 9, the RCG supporter had told a rally at SOAS that Palestinians' armed resistance had "broken free from their open-air prison in Gaza" and was "rising across their occupied country against the Zionist state, which has been bleeding Palestine dry for 80 years." Gaza has been under total air, land and sea blockade by Israel since 2007, a form of collective punishment outlawed by the Geneva Convention.

The RCG noted, "Any charge under this legislation would depend on proving that supporting the Palestinian resistance means supporting a 'proscribed organisation'. It would also call into question United

Nations resolution 37/43 of 3 December 1982 and the Geneva Conventions, which explicitly give the Palestinian people the right to resist occupation by all available means."

The British government has responded to mass demonstrations against Israel's Gaza genocide with a frontal assault on the right to protest and free speech. It is seeking to criminalise left-wing and socialist opposition to a genocide armed and backed by the US, Britain and other NATO powers.

Under the banner of Israel's "right to self-defence" (a right which does not exist for an occupying power), more than 100,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed, wounded or are missing, the UN reported Tuesday. Since the start of Israel's military onslaught, more than 30,000 Palestinians have been killed, including 11,500 children.

By the start of January, Israel had dropped more than 65,000 tonnes of bombs on Gaza, "which is more than the weight and power of three nuclear bombs like those dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima," Gaza's Media Office explained. Two-thirds of the bombs dropped on Gaza were "dumb bombs", named because they are "unguided and imprecise", aimed at inflicting maximum civilian casualties.

Several student protesters were suspended by SOAS on October 12, amid the launch of a state witch-hunt targeting left-wing and socialist opponents of the Gaza genocide. Just one day earlier, Education Secretary Gillian Keegan had written to vice-chancellors demanding they report any "pro-Hamas" activity on campus to police.

Keegan's letter reminded VCs of their duty, under draconian Prevent legislation, "to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" and demanded they "pay particular attention to any invitations issued by staff or

students at your institution to speakers on this subject in order to ensure that any such events do not provide a platform for illegal speech.”

On October 17, Keegan told the *Telegraph* any students found supporting Hamas—whose political wing was proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK government in November 2021—face prosecution and the prospect of a 14-year prison term.

The *Telegraph* spelled out the meaning of the government’s legal dragnet on October 17, claiming, “Left-wing Palestine supporters have celebrated the bloodshed”—this from a newspaper that has revelled in Israel’s carnage.

It denounced “Marxist, Communist and Palestine societies at eight British universities [who] have scrawled ‘intifada til victory’ slogans on posters” and identified “Communist societies at the universities of Manchester, Southampton, Lancaster, Leeds Beckett and Manchester Metropolitan, the Marxist society at University of East London and the Palestine society at the University of Sheffield.”

The criminalisation of left-wing speech was underscored at Saturday’s mass demonstration in London, where a member of the International Marxist Tendency was arrested for displaying a placard and newspaper with the words ‘Intifada ‘til victory!’, and ‘Fight imperialism with intifada!’, allegedly breaching Section 12 of the Terrorism Act (support for a terrorist organisation).

Held at Walworth police station in south London for several hours, he was released later that evening without charge.

State efforts to brand “intifada” a terrorist slogan have no factual or legal foundation. It is an Arabic word meaning “shaking off”, used since 1987 to describe the mass uprising and civil disobedience by Palestinian youth against Zionist military occupation. Repeated UN resolutions have affirmed the legal obligation of Israel to withdraw from the Palestinian territories it occupied during the 1967 Six Day War, and Palestinians’ right to resist is protected under international law, while systematically denied in practice.

More than 400 arrests had been made by London Metropolitan Police over Gaza protests by the end of December, according to the Met. In January, Dominic Murphy, head of the Met’s Counter Terrorism

Command, revealed that a dedicated taskforce had been established “to identify terrorism offences linked to protests.” So far, more than 30 counter-terrorism investigations have been launched into “suspected offences” at protests in London.

Policing operations against mass protests over Gaza are being led from the Met’s central operations control room in Lambeth. Senior Home Office officials, including two Special Lead Advisors for Hate Crime and Media and Communications, have been given unprecedented access to the control room, it was revealed in December, alongside Crown Prosecution Service lawyers and representatives of the Zionist Community Security Trust (CST), which works closely with the British and Israeli governments. In October, CST chief executive Mark Gardener met with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Home Secretary Suella Braverman and senior police at an “Israel Policing Roundtable” at 10 Downing Street. The CST has called repeatedly for the banning of marches against Israel’s genocide, slandering them as “anti-semitic.”

On the platform at Saturday’s Gaza protest in London, speakers from the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) were silent on the dawn police raid and arrest of a SOAS student just day earlier. STWC organisers, including its Deputy President Jeremy Corbyn and leaders of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, are playing down the ferocity of police-state targeting of left-wing groups. They are working to block mass opposition by workers and young people toward the Labour Party.

During his four years as Labour leader, Corbyn opposed any fight to oust the right-wing from the party, betraying his supporters and handing the leadership to Blairite Sir Keir Starmer. Starmer has become a hate figure among workers and youth over his championing of Israel’s “right to self-defence” and support for collective punishment. He has attacked protests over the Gaza genocide, libelling them a screen for “hate marchers” and “people who hate Jews.”



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