

Sunak government ready to roll out new “extremism” legislation targeting anti-genocide protests and the left

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Within 48 hours of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s statement outside Downing Street describing Gaza genocide protests as “extremist disruption and criminality” that had to be crushed, the first measures are being rapidly rolled out.

The *Times* reported, “Ministers are to broaden the government’s definition of extremism as part of a crackdown on people and groups ‘undermining’ Britain’s institutions and values.”

The previous definition, in place for more than a decade, defines extremism as “vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values”. The *Times* reports that this “is seen by the government as no longer being fit for purpose.” The new definition is set to be in place “later this month.”

Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove began his review of the new definition in spring last year. According to a report by the *Observer* last November, extremism is to be defined as “the promotion or advancement of any ideology which aims to overturn or undermine the UK’s system of parliamentary democracy, its institutions and values” or to “threaten the rights of individuals or create a permissive environment for radicalisation, hate crime and terrorism”.

The *Times* noted, “Senior Whitehall sources said that the announcement, expected later this month, would include a list of groups that fell foul of the new definition, but added that this was still being worked on and was ‘legally fraught’...

“Gove is also expected to announce details of a government unit for combating extremism that will be responsible for providing leadership and training for officials across government departments to improve

their ability to identify signs and instances of extremism.

“The unit is also expected to assess whether individuals or groups have breached the new definition and will collect data and research to inform counterextremism policies.”

The *Mail on Sunday* led its front page with an article backing Sunak’s attack on “poisonous” extremism, citing an accompanying piece by former Home Office Minister Robert Jenrick.

Jenrick called for the police to take more action against “extremists” and “hate preachers” online, saying their current approach was creating a “petri dish for radicalisation”. He argued, “We must immediately end the two-tiered policing that has consistently let extremists off the hook. Appeasement has only emboldened them.”

Also cited was Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of counter-terrorism legislation, who stated, “I haven’t seen this level of open extremism out there since I was appointed in 2019. It is the public brazenness of hate directed towards people by category, in particular Zionists, or Israelis, or Jews.”

The tabloid *Sun* editorialised, “Given the challenges of controlling increasingly disruptive pro-Palestinian marches, fuelled by racist and anti-Semitic sloganeering,” all efforts had to be in place to “crack down on the extremism on our streets.”

Sunak warned in his Downing Street diatribe that he had hosted police leaders two days earlier, who had agreed a series of measures for cracking down on the right to protest. He told the police, “There is a growing consensus that mob rule is replacing democratic rule... We simply cannot allow this pattern of increasingly

violent and intimidatory behaviour”.

In his Friday speech, Sunak dismissed the technical separation of police and government decision-making to call for a politicised police force. “I respect that the police have a tough job in policing the protests we have seen and that they are operationally independent. But we must draw a line.”

For months, Sunak and his ministers have demanded that the police impose with greater effect the vast powers of repression already in place.

On Saturday, a march organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) was prevented from gathering outside a branch of Barclays Bank on Tottenham Court Road, London and kept on the opposite side of the road by the Metropolitan Police, who cited Section 14 of the Public Order Act covering static protests.

Police also issued a Section 35 dispersal order to remove pro-Palestinian protesters from Trafalgar Square. Westminster Police stated, “We made 12 arrests, including nine people for failing to comply with the dispersal order.”

The *Guardian* also reported on Sunday plans by the government’s adviser on political violence, Lord Walney, the title bestowed on John Woodcock, a former Blairite Labour MP involved in the bogus “antisemitism” witch-hunt of Jeremy Corbyn’s supporters. He has recommended that “mainstream political leaders should tell their representatives to employ a ‘zero-tolerance approach’ to groups that use disruptive tactics or fail to stop ‘hate’ on marches.”

Among the groups listed are the PSC, which has coordinated hundreds of marches nationally against the Gaza genocide. Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil are also listed. Writing in the *Sun on Sunday*, Walney directed, “Rishi [Sunak] and Keir [Starmer] should instruct their MPs and councillors not to engage with anyone from the PSC until they get their house in order and cut the hate from their marches.”

This instruction is in fact aimed squarely at ensuring Starmer moves further in his attacks on the demonstrations. The *Guardian* notes, “Several sitting Labour MPs have attended PSC events—including the former shadow chancellor John McDonnell and the MP for Poplar and Limehouse, Apsana Begum. Labour has refused to suspend MPs who have attended events, despite demands from senior Tories, because PSC is

not a proscribed organisation.”

Walney gave testimony to Parliament’s Home Affairs Committee’s “Policing of Protests” inquiry, which issued a report on February 27, the day before Sunak hosted the police in Downing Street to agree a strategy to crackdown on demonstrations, including banning them from taking place outside Parliament and other “democratic venues”.

The report notes of Walney’s record: “In 2021, he was asked by the then Prime Minister, Rt Hon Boris Johnson, to lead a review of the activity and prominence of political groups. The review was intended to seek views on the rise in prominence of far-right, far-left and other extreme single-issue political groups. On 12 December 2023, Lord Walney told us he had been about to submit his review, but owing to the events of October 7 2023 and the ‘immediate sweep of protests and the issues that have happened since’, he had been ‘rapidly reviewing with a view to resubmitting imminently’”.

Slanders of protesters who have marched in their hundreds of thousands in nine national demonstrations and demands for their repression are fully backed by the Labour Party, which functions as a parliamentary “opposition” to the Tories only in name.

Replying in parliament last week to Security Minister Tom Tugendhat, who had just described protesters as “thugs”, his Labour shadow minister Dan Jarvis, a former major in the Parachute Regiment, stated, “Recent protests, alongside threats to and intimidation of politicians, have also raised the issue of what is defined as hateful extremism. The Government have not yet brought forward a definition, but that would be helpful in countering threats and intimidation.

“Can the Minister say when the Government... will bring forward a definition, and outline when the Government will bring forward an updated counter-extremism strategy?”



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