

Filton 18 supporters protest outside Old Bailey: “This is about criminalising resistance”

Our reporters
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Around 200 people rallied outside the Old Bailey on Friday to defend Palestine Action members, the Filton 18, being held on remand over a protest last August at Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems in Filton, near Bristol.

Relatives, friends and supporters of the Filton 18 held placards displaying the names and photos of those in prison on remand, nearly all of them young, who are still being investigated under counter-terror laws despite being charged with non-terror related offences.

All 18 were initially arrested and detained for one week under the Terrorism Act (2000).

A speaker from Palestine Action said the Filton 18 “were only trying to do what our government, under international law, has totally failed to do, to stop the flow of arms to Israel being used to commit a genocide.”

A speaker from the Palestinian Youth Movement said, “The British state is using counter-terrorism laws to silence those who dare to stand in the way of genocide by disrupting a weapons factory that manufactures the very same drones, bullets and bombs used by the Zionist entity to murder our people and to destroy our land to make way for more illegal settlements.

“While the Zionist entity continues to carry out mass murder with these British made weapons, this government dares to call those who disrupt the supply chain terrorists. This is not about law and order but about political repression. It is about criminalising resistance, it is about protecting the arms industry and defending genocide.”

Maria, a schoolteacher and colleague of one of the Filton 18, Leona Kamio, told *World Socialist Web Site*

reporters outside the court that Kamio has been on remand at Eastwood Park Prison near Bristol since last August. She described conditions there as “very harsh and difficult for her” and that she has been “suffering quite a lot.”

Kamio is a “very caring and loving person. I think she saw the injustice going on in Gaza... and really, she just wanted to do all that she can to try and stop this genocide.”

Maria explained that counter-terrorism police also raided the home of Kamio’s mother--who was not involved with Palestine Action or with protesting at Elbit Systems--arresting and detaining her under the Terrorism Act, “They didn’t know where she was for five days... nobody in the family knew where she was.”

Among those protesting was a large delegation from Defend Our Juries (DoJ) opposing attacks on the jury system, including moves by the British government to do away with jury trials for certain types of crimes. Anne Richards from the group explained, “It is a cornerstone of British law that if you are charged then you have the right to be tried by 12 of your own peers.”

The group was founded after Trudi Warner, a retired social worker, was arrested for holding a placard outside a court hearing for climate activists in March 2023, reminding jurors of their right to refuse to convict for reasons of conscience.

England’s Solicitor General had threatened Warner with prison for contempt of court, but she won a High Court victory in August 2024. A broader assault on the rights of jurors and defendants at trial is underway, including forbidding pro-Palestinian and climate activists from speaking about their political motivations

in court.

Anne Richards explained, “The same issues are relevant for the Filton 18 as they are for climate activists, so [being here] it’s really showing our solidarity for those who have been arrested and charged.”

Friday’s rally was met by a large and aggressive police presence. Specialist police vans with cameras surveyed the area around the court, while police spotters marched around checking the wording of posters and placards. They threatened protesters if they did not take down Palestinian flags tied to street furniture.

At one point, around 30 City of London police marched in formation charging through protesters on the Old Bailey side of the road, to arrest a speaker on the opposite side. A clear pathway was available to police without forcing their way through protesters, but they chose to wade in with force, pushing people aside and even throwing one protester by the collar out of the way.

Police also moved in from the opposite side of the road, effectively kettling protesters. The arrested protester was bundled into a police van behind a line of City of London officers, while protesters chanted “Let her go!”

Members of the Socialist Equality Party attended the rally to defend the Filton 18, distributing a statement demanding the dropping of all charges. SEP members insisted that defeating imperialist war and genocide could be achieved only through the mobilisation of the working class against capitalism. SEP Assistant National Secretary Thomas Scripps covered the hearing for the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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