

Oppose the proscription of Palestine Action under UK counter-terror laws! Defend the right to protest imperialist genocide and war!

Socialist Equality Party (UK)
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The Socialist Equality Party denounces the Starmer Labour government's announced proscription of Palestine Action under the Terrorism Act (2000). Labour's preparations to ban PA as a "terrorist organisation" are a frame-up and a fundamental attack on the democratic rights of the entire working class.

The government is moving with extraordinary speed. Speaking in parliament Monday, Home Secretary Yvette Cooper declared: "A draft proscription order will be laid in Parliament on Monday 30 June. If passed, it will make it illegal to be a member of, or invite support for, Palestine Action."

Plans to proscribe PA were announced to the BBC on Friday, just hours after a handful of PA activists breached security at RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, dousing two military supply planes with red paint. This peaceful protest was seized on by the government to brand PA and its members as "violent extremists" and "terrorists".

Cooper told parliament the protest was "the latest in a long history of unacceptable criminal damage committed by Palestine Action" which posed a threat to "national security." Without a shred of evidence, she alleged that PA's activities had demonstrated a "willingness to use violence" and revealed that Friday's action was being investigated by counter-terrorism police.

PA's activities meet the statutory definition of Terrorism under the Act, Cooper claimed, declaring, "This has been assessed through a robust evidence-based process, by a wide range of experts from across government, the police and the Security Services." In other words, it is a state conspiracy at the highest level.

Speaking just one day after Prime Minister Keir Starmer backed the US bombing of Iran, a war crime under international law with catastrophic implications for the people of Iran, the Middle East and the world, Cooper declared: "The first duty of government is to keep our country safe".

Millions of workers and young people who have protested the imperialist-backed genocide in Gaza will reject PA's designation as a "terrorist" organisation. Britain has deployed weaponry and intelligence to help the Israeli state kill more than 60,000 Palestinians, including 17,000 children, with thousands more buried under rubble.

Today's announcement by Cooper means that PA is being defined as an organisation that "commits or participates in acts of terrorism; prepares for terrorism; promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism); or is otherwise concerned in terrorism." Among the 81 groups currently listed as terrorist organisations are Al Qa'ida, ISIS and the Atomwaffen Division (AWD) also known as National Socialist Order (NSO).

The proscription of PA has far-reaching implications. Under the Terrorism Act, it is a criminal offence for a person to:

- belong to a proscribed organisation;
- invite support for a proscribed organisation;
- recklessly express support for a proscribed organisation;
- arrange a meeting in support of a proscribed organisation;
- wear clothing or carry articles in public which arouse reasonable suspicion that an individual is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation; or
- publish an image of an article such as a flag or logo in the same circumstances.

Offending on the first four charges carries a maximum sentence of 14 years' imprisonment. If Britain's parliament votes to proscribe PA, anyone who publicly supports it can be prosecuted and imprisoned. It would mean, for instance, that the *World Socialist Web Site* would face prosecution for reporting the campaign to free the Filton 18, who are being held on remand and face trial for taking action against Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems.

The proscription of Palestine Action is a Trojan Horse for a frontal assault on the right to protest and free speech. It transforms the duty to oppose genocide and other crimes under international law—including the launch of an unprovoked war of aggression against Iran—into an act of terrorism.

And if non-violent sabotage by individual protesters is

Mass opposition

designated terrorist, then what of strikes by seafarers and waterside workers, or factory and logistics workers who boycott the supply of weapons and other equipment to the Israeli war machine, as has been done by French, Greek and Italian dockers?

Britain has a long history of civil disobedience campaigns, where the right to protest, including at military installations, has been upheld by the courts. In 1996 four British women, the Ploughshare Four, vandalised a BAE Hawk plane to stop it being sent to Indonesia for use against the East Timorese people. Facing a possible ten-year sentence for criminal damage, they were exonerated by a jury who deemed their action reasonable to prevent a genocide.

In 2003, the Fairford Five broke into an RAF airbase to attack planes bound for Iraq, seeking to prevent their use in an illegal war. On appeal, two were acquitted after the jury accepted their actions were reasonable in trying to prevent war crimes. None were imprisoned. The lawyer for one of the appellants was Keir Starmer.

Any such legal defence is jettisoned through the classification of protest as terrorism.

The planned proscription of PA has been opposed by human rights groups including CAGE, Amnesty International and Liberty. Liberty's Director Akiko Hart issued a statement Monday that "We're worried about the chilling effect this would have on the thousands of people who campaign for Palestine, and their ability to express themselves and take part in protests."

Author Sally Rooney contributed an Op-Ed piece in the *Guardian* headlined, "Israel kills innocent Palestinians. Activists spray-paint a plane. Guess which the UK government calls terrorism".

Stop the War Coalition, and MPs including Diane Abbott, Zarah Sultana, Richard Burgon, Ian Byrne, Apsana Begum, Bell Ribeiro-Addy and Jeremy Corbyn have issued statements in defence of PA and its members, calling on the government to reverse its decision.

But the Starmer government is doubling down. Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds appeared on the BBC's *Sunday* program with Laura Kuenssberg, embracing her baseless accusations of "foreign influence" over PA's actions and declaring this was being investigated. Needless to say, Kuenssberg was silent on the mountain of evidence uncovered by PA through Freedom of Information exposing collusion between Israeli state officials and the British government and counter-terrorism police in the decision to target its members.

The timing of the proscription announcement, less than 24 hours after US airstrikes on Iran that are backed by the British government, makes clear the connection between escalating imperialist war and a war on democratic rights at home.

"Left-wing extremism"

PA's protest at RAF Brize Norton is the pretext seized on by the government, police and intelligence agencies to implement plans long in the making to criminalise leftwing and anti-war protest and speech. In 2019, the WSWs warned about the UK government's Counter Extremism Strategy targeting the "far-left". A report by the Commission for Countering Extremism claimed the far-left's "revolutionary workerist ideas" were associated with increased sympathy for "violent extremist tactics."

Among the "extremist" views it listed as potentially leading to terrorism were: "We should always support striking workers"; "Industry should produce for need and not for profit"; and "I stand in solidarity with all targets of US military action". Nearly six years later, opposition to genocide can be added to their list as the British state seeks to criminalise views held by millions—if not billions—of workers and young people worldwide.

The actions of the Starmer government show that the dictatorial measures of the Trump administration, which has deployed police and military forces onto US streets to deport immigrants and round up and imprison political opponents, is part of a universal turn by imperialism to war and repression.

Faced with mounting opposition, the British state, with Labour at the helm, is moving to police state methods of rule. The attack on PA is preparation for state repression against the strikes and mass protests that will inevitably erupt against the imposition of deeply unpopular wars and the mass austerity necessary to wage them.

Imperialist war and state violence and repression cannot be fought through the methods of protest politics. The working class is the only social force with the power to defeat imperialism. A campaign to defeat the attacks on Palestine Action and the barrage of attacks on democratic rights means building a global anti-war movement rooted in the working class, and aimed against the capitalist system.



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