

British parliament votes to proscribe Palestine Action: a historic assault on democratic rights

Laura Tiernan**2 July 2025**

The House of Commons voted Wednesday to support Home Secretary Yvette Cooper's order banning Palestine Action as a terrorist organization. It was a stampede, with 385 MPs approving proscription, versus just 26 against. Their vote brings the state within touching distance of branding peaceful protests against genocide an act of terrorism.

When the order is approved in the House of Lords Thursday, Palestine Action will be defined as a terrorist organisation at Friday midnight. Being a member of or uttering support for Palestine Action will be a crime under the Terrorism Act, punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

On Friday, lawyers for Palestine Action will appear before the High Court seeking an interim injunction to stop the terrorist ban taking effect, pending the outcome of a judicial review of the government's order.

Today's vote pits a Labour government, led by former human rights lawyer Sir Keir Starmer, against millions opposing the Gaza genocide and a groundswell of popular opposition to parliament's historic assault on the right to protest, freedom of speech and free assembly.

Since Cooper announced her intent to ban Palestine Action after the group's peaceful protest at the RAF's Brize Norton base on June 20, tens of thousands have expressed outrage at the government's efforts to criminalise opposition to the Gaza genocide.

At Glastonbury Festival last weekend, thousands of young people cheered Kneecap and Bob Vylan for supporting Palestine Action. Kneecap's Mo Chara is himself charged with supporting terrorism for his vocal defence of the Palestinian people.

Britain's parliament voted in open defiance of several United Nations Special Rapporteurs who wrote to the government on Tuesday protesting its moves to

proscribe PA. They said, "According to international standards, acts of protest that damage property, but are not intended to kill or injure people, should not be treated as terrorism." They warned, "This would have a chilling effect on political protest and advocacy generally in relation to defending human rights in Palestine."

But this is precisely the government's intention.

The UN experts joined more than 3,000 lawyers, academics and prominent personalities across the UK who signed an open letter calling on the Home Secretary to halt her banning order. The letter warned the government against "seeking to criminalise direct action whilst themselves at risk of breaching international law, given the International Court of Justice's findings of plausible genocide in Gaza."

But Starmer's government proved hostile to the most basic democratic principles.

Opposition in the British parliament was almost non-existent. Of the 26 who voted against proscription, just 9 are sitting Labour MPs. They joined 6 Independents, including Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Zarah Sultana. Six Liberal Democrats voted against, while 66 of them did not vote. Not a single SNP member opposed proscription, with all nine abstaining.

Palestine Action is listed in the proscription order alongside the Maniacs Murder Cult and Russia Imperial Movement, listed as terrorist groups in the United States but practically unknown in Britain. It was tacit admission that banning PA has no legal foundation.

Yet Labour's Minister of State for Security Dan Jarvis declared brazenly that linking PA with these fascist organisations reaffirmed "the UK's zero tolerance approach to terrorism, regardless of its form or underlying ideology."

Speaking in opposition, Jeremy Corbyn referenced

“decades of our history” when those who often used direct action methods “have stood up for free speech and for democracy, going back to the Chartists, going back to the Suffragettes, those that campaigned to end apartheid in South Africa.”

His central role, as ever, was to promote illusions in the capitalist state. Citing Palestine Action’s High Court appeal for a judicial review of the government’s banning order, Corbyn appealed to Labour’s Minister For Security, “Can it be made clear that the order will not be put into force until all legal avenues have been exhausted...?” In the face of a state rampage against the democratic rights of the working class he implored, “We need to know that all democratic avenues have been fully explored in this process.”

Zarah Sultana, being set up as Corbyn’s successor, described the proscription as “an unprecedented and dangerous overreach of the state,” lumping together “a non-violent network of students, nurses, teachers, firefighters and peace campaigners—ordinary people, my constituents and yours—with neo-Nazi militias and mass-casualty cults.

“By this weekend, millions of people, including many of our constituents, could be placed under these sweeping restrictions.”

Palestine Action’s “true offence is being audacious enough to expose the blood-soaked ties between this Government and the genocidal Israeli apartheid state and its war machine,” she said. “I say this loudly and proudly, on Wednesday 2 July 2025, we are all Palestine Action.”

But this was a dialogue with the deaf. Today’s vote confirms there is no constituency in the ruling class, its parties and parliament for the defence of democratic rights.

At Downing Street, several thousand assembled to oppose the proscription of PA. The demonstration had been due to assemble outside parliament, but London’s Metropolitan Police imposed restrictions on the protest. Four people were arrested, including Emma Kamio, mother of Leona Kamio, one of the Filton 18 political prisoners.

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