

UK police use Palestine Action proscription to target protest mentioning “Gaza” and “genocide”

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A protester waving a Palestine flag and displaying a sign saying “Israel is committing genocide” was harassed by police and threatened with arrest under the Terrorism Act this Monday. The event in Canterbury shows the march to a police state being carried out by the Labour government.

Two officers approached the protester, asking, “What is your intention here today?”

When the woman answered that her intention was to “wave this flag and keep Palestine in the public consciousness,” she was questioned, “Do you support any proscribed group?”

Direct action protest group Palestine Action was proscribed as a terrorist organisation on July 4, meaning expressing support for the organisation is punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

A police officer responded, “The way your behaving at the moment would lead me to believe that you may be [a supporter].”

The woman answered clearly, “I do not support any proscribed group. I support a free Palestine and the end of genocide.”

The officer says, “Support of this [the sign reading ‘Israel is committing genocide’], mentioning freedom of Gaza, Israel, genocide, all of that, it will come under proscribed groups which are terror groups... which we have suspicion that you’re supporting, based on your actions here, in a city with the flags and the posters you’ve got up.”

He goes on to read from the Terrorism Act, citing: “expressing an opinion or belief that’s supportive of a proscribed organisation,” then adding, “Now that you have done.” The protester replies, “That’s ridiculous; you’re going to end up arresting half the country... So I

can never do this again?”

“It’s an offence,” the officer replies.

When the protester asks if they can ever “do this in public again,” the officer replies, “If you just had a flag, we’d probably say be careful what you do” but in the context of the statement “‘Free Gaza’, which is supportive of a proscribed organisation, and a sign [stating] Israel is committing genocide would be in line with...”

His colleague interrupts, “What you’re doing is giving us suspicion. We only need two out of ten to give us suspicion that you support a Palestinian group.”

Whether this is official policy, to be applied wholesale across the country, or not it shows the powers given to police by Labour’s proscription to intimidate and potentially criminalise *any* protest activity against the Israeli state’s internationally recognised genocide in Gaza, or in defence of the Palestinians.

Refusing Palestine Action interim relief from the effects of the proscription order until a judicial review can be held, Mr. Justice Chamberlain accepted that the order “will undoubtedly have severe effects on the claimant and many others” and “cast a long shadow over legitimate speech.”

What that means has now been demonstrated.

The Canterbury protester is right that applying this standard universally would mean arresting (at least) half the country—an impossibility. But the Labour government and its police force will use this broad license selectively, going after the most politically active individuals in an attempt to paralyse broader mobilisations.

Members of left-wing political organisations, who

have already been arrested in significant numbers at anti-genocide demonstrations, on bogus charges of hate speech, will likely be heavily targeted. The Terrorism Act, now made applicable to widely held political opinion, gives the police enormous powers to detain, search and seize possessions, which it can use to surveil and move against the government's political opponents.

Protesters arrested under the Terrorism Act in Edinburgh

The day after this event in Canterbury, three women were arrested under the Terrorism Act in Edinburgh after a van was driven into the fence of a factory owned by arms manufacturer, Leonardo.

Shut Down Leonardo, a direct action campaign, posted a photo of the van, a Palestinian flag hanging from the back, with three women and police on the roof.

The organisation explained: "Scottish group launches by taking action against Leonardo's Edinburgh factory. The front of the site has been damaged and action takers drove a van into the perimeter. This factory makes laser target systems for Israel's F-35 fighter jets."

If the three arrested activists in Edinburgh are prosecuted under the Terrorism Act, then the arguments relied upon by Chamberlain in rejecting interim relief from the PA proscription are null and void. The judge said in his judgement—insisting that the order would have no broader gagging effect—that individuals "who were members of PA prior to proscription" would be allowed to continue protesting.

He added that "*Even if their protests take the form of direct action which involves criminality*, the fact that they were previously members of an organisation which is now proscribed would not as a matter of law aggravate their criminal conduct [emphasis added]."

The basic legal point is that the proscription makes membership and support of *the specific group Palestine Action* a terror offence, and nothing else. Direct action in the Palestinian cause, including action which may be judged criminal at court, is not in and of itself

"terrorist"—even by the anti-democratic order of the government.

But as the police harassment in Canterbury makes clear, the government's intentions are far broader, aimed at taking a sledgehammer to democratic rights, and to criminalise the mass popular movement against imperialist-backed genocide.



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