

Fight Starmer's police state—Build a movement in the working class!

Socialist Equality Party (UK)

10 August 2025

Over 530 protesters were arrested in the UK this weekend under the Terrorism Act (2000). Their “crime” was to sit peacefully in Parliament Square, London on Saturday holding a sign reading, “I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.”

This is the most significant mass political arrest in post-war British history. It is a major step towards a police state being established by Keir Starmer’s Labour government to enforce policies of austerity, war and support for genocide.

The Socialist Equality Party denounces Labour’s actions. We demand the dropping of all charges against those peacefully exercising their rights to free speech and assembly. We support the legal effort to overturn the proscription of direct action protest group Palestine Action, which is the basis for prosecutions under the Terrorism Act.

For Starmer’s authoritarian crackdown to be defeated, there must be a mass mobilisation in defence of democratic rights, rooted in the working class. We call on and will support workers to:

- Organise meetings in your workplaces and neighbourhoods to discuss these issues.
- Propose and pass resolutions opposing the police crackdown and pledging to prepare coordinated action against it.
- Oppose the trade union bureaucracy’s blocking working class action against the Gaza genocide and attacks on democratic rights.

Operation “arrest them all”

The attack on Saturday’s protest, called by Defend Our Juries, began on Wednesday, when the organisation’s website providing advice on the right to protest was taken offline. The next day, an online legal briefing hosted by the group through Zoom was shut down on the orders of the Counter Terrorism Police.

At the protest, police moved into the crowd and walked or carried people away to “prisoner processing points” in Westminster. “Those whose details could be confirmed were bailed, with conditions not to attend any further protest in support of Palestine Action,” a police spokesperson said.

Among those seized was someone in a wheelchair and a Jewish

activist carrying a sign reading “Never again.” Over half were over 60 years of age. One was blind.

Preparations were made for more arrests and imprisonments if necessary. According to *Sky News*, “Senior leaders in the prison service, known as ‘Capacity Gold’, met “to discuss how to deal with the large number of arrests as the male prison estate is close to full.

“It’s understood 800 inmates were moved out of the busiest jails in and around London beforehand”.

The far-right given free rein

While this was taking place in London, far-right demonstrations were being held outside buildings housing asylum seekers, demanding their expulsion—inspired by last summer’s pogrom-type riots.

In Nuneaton the event was organised by the neo-Nazi Homeland Party, a split from Patriotic Alternative, which has links to members of the proscribed National Action. A banner was unfurled demanding the party’s policy of “Remigration NOW!” This is a euphemism for mass deportations of anyone claiming to be of recent migrant heritage, legal resident or not.

Just one person was arrested, for making threats to cause criminal damage, despite physical attacks on counter protesters.

The response in the press has been to publish a barrage of sympathetic articles explaining that “people are angry”.

A police state in defence of genocide, war and austerity

This is not a case of two standards applied by Starmer, the police and the media, but the same right-wing standard: vicious hostility to anti-war, anti-imperialist sentiment and support for nationalist xenophobia.

As the anti-asylum and anti-genocide protests were being held, the government announced far-right dog-whistle plans to immediately deport foreign offenders upon conviction.

Labour received the backing of the ruling class in the last

election on the promise that it could push through measures which the crisis-ridden Tories could not: continuing support for the Gaza genocide, the NATO war in Ukraine, and US threats against Iran and China; ramping up military spending to 5 percent of GDP to fuel this militarist rampage; waging class war on the working class to provide the funds.

They will not back down from this reactionary agenda, vital to the interests of British capitalism and imperialism, which they know cannot be pursued democratically.

Former Director of Public Prosecutions Keir Starmer and his leadership team trained in the “left antisemitism” witch-hunt of Jeremy Corbyn’s supporters have been selected to clear the path of organised opposition. The persecution of protesters against a genocide in which the UK government is complicit will be made the spearhead of an assault on all left-wing political activity.

Further arrests of political leaders—coming alongside the ongoing prosecutions for public order offences of leaders of the Stop the War Coalition, Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—confirm this warning. Among those taken by police were: Moazzam Begg, a victim of Guantanamo Bay and now Outreach Director at CAGE, which campaigns against attacks on democracy in the name of the “War on Terror”. Charlie Kimber, a senior figure in the Socialist Workers Party, was also arrested.

No to the minimisation of state repression!

In the face of this political offensive, the naivete encouraged by organisations like Novara Media must be rejected by workers and young people. Their headline article declared, “Police Fail to Arrest Hundreds Who Defy Palestine Action Ban. It’s unenforceable.”

In fact, a majority of those carrying placards were arrested, taking the total to well over 700 since the proscription was overwhelmingly voted through the “Mother of Parliaments” at the start of July. Collective acts of what are still individual protests of personal conscience cannot overcome Starmer’s political police.

Defend Our Juries has also minimised the seriousness of the government crackdown. It described the first prosecutions of protesters under the Terrorism Act as “feeble attempts to intimidate”, given that they were carried out under Section 13, with a maximum sentence of six months in prison, rather than Section 12.

Firstly, there is no guarantee that all prosecutions will proceed under Section 13. Counter Terror Police announced on August 7 that 58 people had been arrested to that point under Section 12, carrying a maximum sentence of 14 years’ imprisonment.

Secondly, any conviction on a terrorism charge severely affects employment prospects, including making it impossible to work in education and ends the ability to travel to the US and other countries.

Most fundamentally, a precedent of political repression is being set by these arrests, the screws of which can be rapidly

tightened—including on all those anti-genocide protesters previously denounced as terrorist supporters.

Class struggle, not moral pressure!

Rose-tinted portrayals of Saturday’s Defend Our Juries protest provide a political cover for the organisers of the national demonstration of 300,000 people against the Gaza genocide held that same day in the same city, a few hundred metres away.

Speakers on the platform like Ben Jamal of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Lindsey German of the Stop the War Coalition denounced the “shameful” mass arrests and sent verbal “solidarity” but provided no programme to combat the Labour government beyond the usual moral pressure on the morally impervious Starmer.

They say nothing more so as to excuse the total inaction of the trade union bureaucracy, the Labour “lefts” and now the new Corbynite Party—launched with a statement insisting “we must defend the right to protest against genocide” but which has done nothing to mobilise its sign-up list of 750,000 people.

The Socialist Equality Party warned in the lead-up to Saturday that Starmer’s police were preparing mass arrests aimed at deepening the repression of anti-genocide protest. We based ourselves on an understanding of the critical class interests at stake in Labour’s crackdown: the ability of British imperialism to wage war on its opponents abroad and the working class at home.

The same concerns motivate all of the capitalist governments, led by the Trump administration in the United States, that are trampling on democratic rights and illegalising opposition to genocide as the movement in defence of the Palestinians gathers strength across the world. This past week has seen a mass demonstration of hundreds of thousands in Sydney, Australia and rallies across Greece.

As the SEP wrote in response to Palestine Action’s proscription, “The defence of fundamental democratic rights, workers’ living standards and the fight against genocide and war is only possible through the adoption of a new axis of struggle—socialist internationalism.”

This means “a systematic industrial and political mobilisation against the Starmer government, waged by rank-and-file organisations independent of the trade union bureaucracy, and the urgent and necessary formation of a new workers’ party on genuinely socialist foundations, the Socialist Equality Party.”



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