

Almost 900 protesters arrested in London as Palestine Action repression deepens

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The Labour government's clampdown on opposition to Israel's genocide in Gaza escalated on Saturday with the Metropolitan Police arresting nearly 900 people in London in an unprecedented 12-hour operation involving over 2,500 police—including from other forces around Britain.

The vast majority (857) were arrested for their opposition to the proscription under the Terrorism Act of the Palestine Action campaign group. They were singled out for displaying a placard containing seven words: "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action." They were apprehended under the Terrorism Act 2000, Section 13 (1), which carries a maximum sentence of six months in prison.

At another demonstration Saturday in Edinburgh, to demand an end to UK arms sales to Israel, police arrested two men under the Terrorism Act.

The protest in Parliament Square was organised by Defend Our Juries (DOJ), as the latest mass rally against the Gaza genocide—attended by around 200,000 people—marched through central London. DOJ went ahead with the protest once 1,000 people committed to holding the sign. The organisation said around 1,500 joined on Saturday, meaning that near two thirds (57 percent) of them were arrested by police.

With the mass arrests of 55 people in Parliament Square on July 19, more than 70 around Britain the week before, and 532 in the Square on August 9, Saturday's total took the number arrested for opposition to the proscription enacted on July 5 to at least 1,444.

The number arrested in Britain since the genocide began in Gaza is around 1,800. At the more than 30 mass demonstrations in London, hundreds more arrests have been made.

At the January 18 national rally, 77 people were arrested, mainly for "breach of conditions" on the protest imposed by police. These included Stop the War Coalition

chief steward Chris Nineham and Palestine Solidarity Campaign leader Ben Jamal. Other leaders of the anti-war movement, including former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and his former shadow chancellor John McDonnell, were summoned to police stations for questioning. Nineham and Jamal are to be tried next year.

Arrests have also been made of independent journalists and of students protesting the genocide on their campuses. In May 2024, at least 17 students were arrested at the University of Oxford following their occupation of a university administrative building.

Five days ahead of the latest mass arrests, counter-terrorism officers arrested five key members of the Defend our Juries legal defence campaign.

On Friday, the Met issued a statement that they were prepared for any number of arrests the next day, with all contingencies in place.

A September 5 briefing by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Ade Adekan warned, "I can be unequivocal, if you show support for Palestine Action—an offence under the Terrorism Act—you will be arrested... As we have shown in recent weeks, those arrested will be investigated and are very likely to be prosecuted. We have the plans and resources in place to deal with any eventuality. Attempts to overwhelm policing and the wider criminal justice system will not be successful."

The police issued a statement at 1 p.m. Saturday declaring that they were beginning to make arrests. By 5:12 p.m. they reported that 150 arrests had been made. By 7:48 p.m. this had doubled to 300; and by 9:48pm, with Parliament Square in darkness, a total of 425 arrests were reported.

The following morning the Met reported that 890 had been arrested on Saturday and "all those arrested were processed at a prisoner reception point in the Westminster area," but those who refused to provide their details as suggested by Defend Our Juries, or who were found to

have been arrested while already on bail, “were transported to one of a number of Met Police custody suites to be dealt with.”

It then stated, “The number of people dealt with at a prisoner reception point was 341. The number transported to custody for TACT [Terrorism Act] offences was 519.”

Once again, many of those arrested were elderly and infirm. Mike Higgins, who is blind and has additional hearing and physical impairments, was arrested for a second time and taken away in his wheelchair.

People attempted to stop the arrests, chanting “shame on you” to police. The Met denounced this as “a coordinated effort to prevent officers from carrying out their duties which escalated to violence where officers were punched, kicked, spat on and had objects thrown at them.” In fact, just 17 people were arrested after being accused of “assaults on police officers.”

Video footage shows the brutal way many arrests were carried out, police drawing their batons, a police officer shoving an elderly man to the ground and another officer punching his way through the crowd to make an exit route for an underway arrest.

It would be a grave mistake to believe, as is claimed by Defend Our Juries, that the forces of the capitalist state will be “overwhelmed” by protests like Saturday’s, rendering them unable to uphold repressive laws.

Mass arrests have in fact escalated both in numbers and in brutality, driven by the political imperative of silencing opposition to the Gaza genocide and demonstrating the readiness of the Starmer Labour government to do what is demanded of it in imposing the dictates of the ruling elite. The arrests are being followed up with charges that in some cases can lead to 14 years’ imprisonment upon conviction.

Arrests prior to Saturday were carried out with the backing of the Blairite Home Secretary Yvette Cooper. Last week, Cooper’s Home Office secured the right at the Court of Appeal to try to block a move by Palestine Action to have its ban under terror laws overturned.

Friday’s cabinet reshuffle by Prime Minister Keir Starmer saw Cooper become Foreign Secretary, replaced at the Home Office by fellow right-winger Shabana Mahmood. On Sunday, Defence Minister John Healey pledged that Mahmood would continue the repression of anti-war sentiment, warning, “I expect Shabana Mahmood to be just as tough as Yvette Cooper and I expect her to defend the decision the Government’s taken on Palestine Action, because of what some of its members

are responsible for and were planning.”

The Socialist Equality Party has repeatedly insisted that the assault on democratic rights spearheaded by the proscription of Palestine Action can only be countered by the systematic mobilisation of the working class against the Starmer government.

The offensive against democratic rights is necessitated by British imperialism’s efforts to claim a share of the imperialist carve-up of the world’s resources and markets—a contest that drives the proxy war waged by NATO against Russia in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and the broader struggle to dominate the Middle East, and the escalation of hostilities towards China.

Waging trade and military war abroad demands class war at home to crush political and social opposition and militarise economic life through the destruction of essential social provisions and the imposition of savage levels of exploitation.

This cannot be opposed by individual acts of conscience, however bravely expressed. It means the mobilisation of the millions of workers, particularly the younger generation, who want to put an end to Starmer’s hated government of austerity, genocide and war.

The potential for such a movement is presently being actively blocked.

Since launching their “Your Party” project last month and declaring that a new party to the left of Labour will be founded in the autumn, former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and MP Zarah Sultana have won the backing of three quarters of a million people. Yet nothing has been done to mobilise this mass force against the government.

To break out of this political impasse, the defence of fundamental democratic rights, of living standards, and the fight against genocide and war must be conducted based on a new axis of struggle—socialist internationalism—centred on the systematic industrial and political mobilisation of the working class against the Starmer government, waged by rank-and-file organisations independent of the trade union bureaucracy.



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