

# More than 850 arrested in anti-genocide protests in the UK: Workers must lead opposition to Starmer's police state!

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More than 850 people were arrested in Parliament Square in London on Saturday, the latest mass arrests against opponents of the genocide in Gaza. These arrests, which follow the proscription of protest group Palestine Action, have plunged British imperialism deeper into police state forms of rule.

On July 2, the “Mother of Parliaments” voted almost unanimously for a ban overturning democratic freedoms established over centuries. These stretch from the Magna Carta in 1215 through the Bill of Rights in 1689 and the entry of the working class into political struggle with Chartism in the 1830s, which have collectively acted to safeguard citizens from the arbitrary actions of the state and guarantee free speech and freedom of thought and assembly.

This fundamental assault on democratic rights was carried out to criminalise opposition to the greatest crime of the 21st century, the genocide in Gaza, and equate peaceful protest against this atrocity with terrorism.

Under the Terrorism Act (2000), membership in or encouragement of support for a proscribed group carries a sentence of up to 14 years, and even wearing clothing or publicly carrying items indicating support carries a 6-month sentence, or a fine of up to £5,000.

Since parliament's vote, close to 1,500 arrests have been made under this charge, including the 850 on Saturday and over 500 at a protest in the same location in August. Leading figures within Palestine Action and the legal rights campaign group Defend Our Juries have been targeted in police raids and face the maximum penalty under the law.

Over 300 other individuals have been arrested under other laws at pro-Palestine protests, including Stop the War Coalition Vice-Chair Chris Nineham and Palestine Solidarity Campaign Director Ben Jamal. Prominent journalists have had their homes raided and devices seized.

The proscription of Palestine Action and the state repression that has followed have been carried out by a Labour government, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer,

which is the most right-wing in British history. It has made the repression of anti-genocide protests a central plank of a political agenda also demonizing asylum seekers and spewing nationalist poison indistinguishable from that of Nigel Farage's Reform UK.

This has met with little to no opposition within the left wing of the party and has enjoyed the active collusion of the trade unions.

Just nine Labour MPs voted against PA's proscription, comprising a minority of the Socialist Campaign Group, all of whom continue to function as Starmer's loyal opposition.

The trade union bureaucracy, presiding over organisations nominally representing around 6 million workers, has not even issued a statement opposing this mass repression, let alone organised action in protest.

Labour's offensive coincides with the launch, after years of prevarication, of a new party by former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and ex-Labour MP Zarah Sultana promising to be a left alternative to the Starmer government. But despite securing the backing of three quarters of a million people, they too have organised nothing to oppose Labour's crackdown.

Once again, Corbyn's response to the Blairite right, as when he was still party leader, has been to issue moral appeals for a change of course. He wondered to Sky News, “Can't the government think for a moment, maybe they've just got it wrong on this legislation?” Labour, he pleaded, were “surely” also “capable of making the moral case for dealing with asylum seekers by recognising them as human beings in a desperate situation.”

Despite the grave threat to democratic rights and the targeting of anti-genocide activists, the Stop the War Coalition has only published a handful of pro forma articles opposing the proscription of Palestine Action. They have cordoned off the national demonstrations against the Gaza genocide from actions taken opposing the ban, such that when 200,000 people marched last Saturday, only a small

leadership delegation was sent to Parliament Square to proclaim solidarity with the five Defend Our Juries leaders arrested this week.

The response of Britain's pseudo-left groups has been to glorify the Defend Our Juries protests, claiming they are rendering impossible the implementation of PA's proscription, and that this will force the government to retreat. The Socialist Workers Party wrote that "the police were overwhelmed" as "Defend Our Juries humiliate Labour". Novara Media declared, "Police fail to arrest two-thirds in biggest ever protest against Palestine Action ban," describing this as a "huge embarrassment for Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley." The Revolutionary Communist Party referred to a "futile display of 'law and order' by Starmer's government."

Their political intention is to conceal the central lesson to be drawn from these events: the necessity to mobilise the working class in an industrial and political offensive against the Starmer government in opposition to the efforts of the trade union bureaucracy and Labour "lefts" (inside and outside the Labour Party) to prevent the development of such a movement.

Support for Palestine Action and Defend Our Juries is primarily a politically confused response to this bureaucratic sabotage by the Labour "lefts" and the union apparatus, which have neutered the mass movement against Israel's mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians.

Since October 7, 2023, millions in the UK and internationally have taken to the streets to oppose the Gaza genocide, to no avail. Protests began against a Conservative government, but anger was also directed against Starmer who, as leader of the opposition, championed Israel's right to "self defence". Stop the War and the pseudo-left groups insisted that pressure on the streets could both put a Labour government in power and force it to reverse its support for genocide.

Instead, Starmer has maintained an absolute commitment to British imperialism's alliance with Netanyahu's fascistic government and carried out more savage repression of anti-Zionist protests than its Tory predecessors.

Supporters of PA and DOJ therefore became convinced that only direct action by brave individuals could stop the genocide. But neither direct action nor continued marches through London will prompt a retreat by the government.

Threatened with a deepening economic crisis, the ruling class internationally is seeking to secure its position with attacks on the social conditions of the working class and an imperialist campaign for a redivision of the world.

The genocide in Gaza is not an isolated crime, but a central pillar of efforts led by the United States to dominate the geostrategically critical and oil-rich Middle East. It is one

front of a global conflict encompassing the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and the escalating trade war and preparation for military conflict with China.

This requires the launching of class war against the working class. To be globally competitive while carrying out a vast increase in military spending means destroying all that remains of essential social services and imposing brutal levels of exploitation that are incompatible with the preservation of democratic forms of rule.

The most developed expression of this agenda is Donald Trump's campaign to establish a presidential dictatorship, involving the deployment of the armed forces to Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago and other major cities against immigrants and the entire working class. Governments throughout the world must follow suit, none more so than in Britain, which depends on its "special relationship" with the US and is the most enthusiastic advocate of its war agenda.

These are the class imperatives that dictate the actions of the Starmer government, and which mean that its response to the hatred and contempt in which it is held by millions of workers and young people will be a sharper lurch to the right. The attack on PA is preparation for state repression against the strikes and mass protests that will inevitably erupt against the conducting of deeply unpopular wars and the mass austerity necessary to wage them.

Millions are being driven into conflict with the Starmer government and the corporate giants and super rich elite that it serves. But this movement must be given a political programme, organisation and leadership—or risk Reform UK becoming the main political beneficiary of rising discontent.

As the Socialist Equality Party has consistently explained, the defence of fundamental democratic rights and workers' living standards and the fight against genocide and war is only possible with the adoption of a new axis of struggle. This requires new organisations of class struggle in every workplace, university and neighbourhood—rank-and-file committees acting independently of the trade union bureaucracy—and the political mobilization of the working class in opposition to capitalism and for socialism.



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