

Almost 500 anti-genocide activists arrested as Starmer government moves to ban protests outright

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London's Metropolitan Police arrested another 492 people over the weekend after a protest Saturday in Trafalgar Square, as the Starmer government accelerated its crackdown on opposition to the Gaza genocide.

The entirely peaceful protest was held to oppose the proscription of Palestine Action. It was organised by Defend Our Juries and attended by over 1,000 people. Of the arrests, 488 were for holding up signs declaring, "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action".

Police also arrested five members of a group who displayed a massive banner off Westminster Bridge in front of the Houses of Parliament, carrying the same statement.

The youngest arrested was 18 years old, and the eldest 89. The Met have said 297 people remain in custody and the rest have been bailed.

Palestine Action was banned under the Terrorism Act in July, meaning declaring or indicating support for the group is also an offence. Belonging to or advocating support for Palestine Action carries a maximum sentence of 14 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine. Wearing, carrying, or displaying an item that suggests a person is a member or support a proscribed organisation is punishable by a sentence of up to six months or a fine.

Following mass arrests at previous DOJ-organised "Lift The Ban" protests in July, August and September, including 857 on September 6, the total arrested for challenging the Palestine Action proscription now stands at almost 2,200.

This Saturday's protests took place after the killing of two Jewish worshippers and injuries suffered by three others as the result of a terrorist attack on a

synagogue in Manchester on Thursday. The attacker stabbed one of the congregation to death and police killed another by gun shot as they attempted to stop the assailant.

The government is seeking to use the tragedy to intensify its law-and-order agenda, with ministers—including Prime Minister Keir Starmer—and the police calling on protesters not to demonstrate over Gaza out of respect for the dead. This included demands not only that DOJ call off their scheduled Saturday protest, but that the Palestine Coalition call off a national demonstration on October 11 expected to be attended by hundreds of thousands to mark the second anniversary of the genocide and the destruction of Gaza.

Two people lost their lives and three others were seriously injured in the terrible events in Manchester. But no respect or dignity was to be afforded to the 53 people known to have been killed in Gaza by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on the same day. They were among a total of 480 deaths listed by the Gaza Health Ministry and compiled by the United Nations just for the week to October 2.

The number of Palestinians killed by the IDF in the last two years likely numbers in the hundreds of thousands. According to a statement last month by Herzi Halevi, who served as chief of the Israeli military during the first 17 months of the Gaza genocide, over 10 percent of what was a population of 2.2 million people in Gaza are either dead or injured.

Moreover, in the 48 hours from the evening of October 1, Israel carried out an act of piracy, illegally boarding more than 40 vessels and detaining around 500 humanitarian activists in the Global Sumud

Flotilla. Numerous reports attested to the brutal treatment they suffered at the hands of the IDF, including being forced to drink from toilets. Renowned anti-genocide activist Greta Thunberg was forced to kiss the Israeli flag.

Starmer's Labour government refused to condemn Israel's latest act of banditry, despite there being several social democratic and "centre-left" politicians on board with the flotilla.

Moves to force organisers to cancel protests against the genocide are the opening salvo in a broader assault on democratic rights. On Sunday, Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood announced that police will be given new powers to impose conditions on protests and, in an unprecedented attack on the freedom of assembly, to ban them outright.

A statement published by the Home Office and Mahmood stated that with the new powers, which will be brought forward as soon as possible, "Police forces will be authorised to consider the 'cumulative impact' of protests, assessing previous activity when deciding to impose limits on protesters."

It warned, "If a protest has taken place at the same site for weeks on end, and caused repeated disorder, the police will have the authority to, for example, instruct organisers to hold the event somewhere else. Anyone who breaches the conditions will risk arrest and prosecution."

The DOJ protests and national rallies held in London against the Gaza genocide—of which there have been more than 30—would both fall under the category of frequent protests.

Mahmood, the statement added, would "also review existing legislation to ensure that powers are sufficient and being consistently applied", including police powers to ban protests outright.

Provisions making the legislation harsher along these lines are to be included in the "Crime and Policing Bill, which is currently going through Parliament."

Replying to the BBC's Laura Kuenssberg asking if this was a "dark step" to limit the fundamental right to protest, Mahmood replied that having a freedom "doesn't mean you have to use it at every moment of every day".

On cue, the chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation Paula Dodds stated after Saturday's mass round-up, "Enough is enough. Our concentration

should be on keeping people safe at a time when the country is on heightened alert from a terrorist attack. And instead officers are being drawn in to facilitate these relentless protests... What are politicians and senior police officers going to do about it?"

Standing behind the Starmer government and the Labour Party in seeking to criminalise all opposition to the genocide in Gaza are far-right Zionists and their co-thinkers, such as the fascist Tommy Robinson. On Saturday, Robinson announced that he will travel to Israel later this month at the invite of its Diaspora Minister Amichai Chikli—in what amounts to a state visit—where he will be feted by the Netanyahu government.

The offensive against protesters in Britain by a government up to its neck in Israel's genocide and myriad war crimes is part of a global turn to police-state measures. In the United States, the Trump administration has weaponised the killing of the fascist operative Charlie Kirk to ramp up its plans to impose a presidential dictatorship, claiming he was the victim of left-wing violence.

Starmer, the former human rights lawyer turned right-wing law-and-order zealot, is mounting his own offensive against anti-genocide protests and the left.

Writing an opinion piece published in the *Jewish Chronicle* and *Jewish News*, he pontificates that whereas "Peaceful protest is a cornerstone of our democracy—and there is justified concern about the suffering in Gaza," an unspecified "minority have used these protests as a pretext for stoking antisemitic tropes" and the protests should be called off so as not "to stoke tension and cause further pain" for Britain's Jews.



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