

Proscription of Palestine Action ruled unlawful in blow to UK Labour government

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13 February 2026

The Starmer government's proscription of Palestine Action (PA) as a terrorist organisation has been ruled unlawful by the High Court.

The anti-Gaza genocide direct action group was banned in July 2025, with then Home Secretary Yvette Cooper telling Parliament its peaceful protests particularly targeting weapons manufacturers met the statutory definition for terrorism under the Terrorism Act and posed a threat to national security. Just 25 MPs voted against the order.

Since that time, nearly 3,000 people have been arrested for merely indicating support for the organisation. Police have broadcast warnings not to do so at mass demonstrations.

The "terrorist" label has seen individuals accused of participating in Palestine Action protests prior to the ban subjected to lengthy and draconian imprisonment on remand ahead of trial for criminal damage against Israeli arms suppliers and one UK military plane. Eight young people risked their lives in hunger strikes protesting the ban and their treatment by prison authorities.

This was politically criminal—a dictatorial attempt to intimidate and repress popular opposition to the Israeli state and its genocide of the Palestinians, and the support given by British imperialism. Now the UK's highest court has been forced to admit it was unlawful.

Current Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood said she was "disappointed" with the ruling and disagreed "with the notion that banning this terrorist organisation is disproportionate." She will appeal the decision and PA remains proscribed at least until a hearing later in the month.

The text of the judgment contains such phrases as "Palestine Action is an organisation that promotes its political cause through criminality and encouragement of criminality" and "A very small number of Palestine Action's activities amounted to acts of terrorism within

the definition".

Where the High Court Justices demurred was that "For these, and for Palestine Action's other criminal activities, the general criminal law remains available. The nature and scale of Palestine Action's activities falling within the definition of terrorism had not yet reached the level, scale and persistence to warrant proscription."

Nevertheless, this is still a tremendous defeat for the Labour government. It has spent vast amounts of money and political capital in the course of its anti-democratic campaign spearheaded by the outlawing of Palestine Action.

Hours of screen time and reams of articles have been used by ministers and their flunkies in the press to demonise the organisation. Millions have been spent on policing operations which have seen footage widely broadcast of elderly and disabled protesters being bundled away for quietly holding placards. The government has ignored letters of protest from international human rights organisations and United Nations officials.

This crackdown was supposed to have been rubber stamped by the courts. Clearly the Justices' sympathies are with the government. However, they have intervened to sound a note of caution that its attacks on democratic rights are brazen and are seen as such—at a time when Labour is massively unpopular and mired in crisis over its links with the criminal oligarchy, embodied by the Mandelson-Epstein affair.

The acquittal by a jury of six PA-associated defendants last week will have set alarm bells ringing in the ruling class. The activists broke into Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems' factory at Filton, near Bristol, to dismantle weapons and equipment. They were being tried for aggravated burglary, criminal damage and in the case of two defendants, violent disorder. This related to an altercation with a police officer, which saw one of these individuals also charged with grievous bodily harm.

During the trial, judge Mr. Justice Johnson told jurors to disregard their views on the conflict in the Middle East. He barred any hearing of evidence related to Elbit's contribution to the Israeli war in Gaza.

In addition, in the *Guardian's* reporting, "one juror asked the judge whether it would count as a lawful excuse if a defendant believed they were performing a life-saving action by destroying weapons used to kill civilians in an illegal genocide. Johnson said it would not".

Despite the judge's directions and the torrent of slander in the media portraying the PA activists as violent thugs, the jury deliberated for over 36 hours and delivered verdicts of not guilty on aggravated burglary, while not reaching a verdict on the other charges.

With multiple PA-protest trials set to go ahead this year, the threat of more acquittals was real. Under these conditions, the magistrates set to try the large numbers of people accused simply of expressing support for Palestine Action would be under enormous pressure, and the legal system would be brought into disrepute by such nakedly political prosecutions.

What is taking place in the courts is the tip of an iceberg of popular hostility to the Labour government, its support for Israel and its draconian agenda. It must now find broader expression.

Mass opposition has been kept passive by the leadership of the movement against the Gaza genocide, the Palestine Coalition, which has limited action to routine protests and moral appeals, while championing supine Corbynites, Labour "lefts" and trade union bureaucrats as anti-war leaders—even those like John McDonnell openly supporting NATO's efforts in Ukraine.

Resistance has therefore largely taken the form of defensive actions like legal cases and the actions organised by civil rights group Defend Our Juries. This must now pass over into a *counteroffensive* against the government's attack on democratic rights and support for oppression around the world—one which fuses the spirit of urgency and self-sacrifice which has animated PA protesters with a perspective for the broad mobilisation of millions.

The immediate demands of that movement must be:

- Drop all charges against pro-Palestine activists and supporters, with formal apologies and financial recompense given.
- End the proscription on Palestine Action and all measures to suppress free speech.
- Make public all documents relating to the decision to proscribe Palestine Action, including discussions with

Israeli officials and the US Trump administration.

- Remove from their positions all ministers and government officials responsible for violating democratic rights.
- Repeal all laws infringing the right to protest, beginning with the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022), the Public Order Act (2023), and the whole suite of "counter-terror" legislation.

Fighting for these demands means taking up a political struggle against a Labour government totally committed to its reactionary agenda, at home and abroad. As the Socialist Equality Party has argued in a recent statement, this means building a revolutionary socialist opposition:

The eruption of trade and military war means an end to social compromise and democratic rule and a turn to class war, state repression and right-wing reaction. This finds its most developed expressions in Trump's efforts to erect a fascist dictatorship in the United States, the promotion of far-right parties across Europe, the predatory imperialist war in Ukraine, the Gaza genocide, and the advanced preparations for regime change in Iran.

The new party the working class needs must be built according to these political realities. Its task is the industrial and political mobilisation of the working class, independently of all sections of the labour and trade union bureaucracy, including its left flank now organised as Corbyn and Sultana's Your Party.

The wave of opposition to the proscription of PA, and the persistence of anti-genocide protests, demonstrate the real balance of forces in the country, leaving the Labour government deeply isolated. The problem facing its opponents is not one of powerlessness or lack of determination, but of political organisation. This is the fight which must now be taken up.



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