

# Conviction of UK Palestine Coalition leaders Ben Jamal and Chris Nineham criminalises anti-genocide protest

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The conviction Wednesday of Chris Nineham, vice chairman of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), and Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), is a major escalation in the onslaught on democratic rights by the Starmer Labour government in again criminalising protest against genocide and war.

At Westminster Magistrates' Court, Judge Daniel Sternberg convicted Nineham and Jamal of failing to comply with conditions imposed by London's Metropolitan Police on the national March for Palestine on January 18, 2025. Jamal was additionally convicted of two counts of inciting other protesters to breach police conditions, after the judge ruled that a speech he made at the rally constituted "a suggestion, persuasion, and inducement" to break the law.

The judge said in a verdict whose implications are vast: "Protest rights, while fundamental, are not absolute and do not permit breaching lawfully imposed conditions."

Both defendants were given conditional discharges—18 months for Jamal, 12 months for Nineham—and ordered to pay fines of £7,500 each related to court costs. Outside the court, Nineham described the verdict as "an extraordinary and shocking decision, and a huge setback for civil liberties in this country. It is an attempt to send a chilling message across society that people shouldn't be protesting." He said both would appeal their conviction.

A key part of Nineham and Jamal's legal defence was their contention that the conditions imposed on the January 18 march were unlawful. Following the judge's ruling the Palestine Coalition said, "Extraordinarily, in dismissing this argument... Sternberg informed the court he was not obliged to give any reasons for his decision.

January 18 was the 23rd national demonstration organised by the Palestine Coalition since Israel's invasion of Gaza began in October 2023. It took place

amid calls for pro-Palestinian demonstrations to be subjected to further curtailing and even being banned. Included in these demands by right-wing politicians, including those of Zionist groups, was that the Labour government proscribe the Palestine Action group. This was carried out in July 2025 by Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, sparking months of mass arrests.

By November 2025, 2,100 peaceful protesters had been arrested over the previous five months, merely for holding up a sign reading "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action." Almost 3,000 have been arrested in total since the ban. On February 13 this year, the High Court ruled the proscription of Palestine Action to be unlawful; a decision being challenged by the Starmer government.

Ahead of the January 18 protest (on January 10) the Metropolitan Police banned the march from assembling at BBC headquarters in Portland Place—a location used on two previous occasions by the Palestine Coalition without incident.

The ban was imposed after more than 80 MPs and peers, backed by Zionist groups, wrote to Met chief Sir Mark Rowley demanding restrictions. Further pressure was piled on by the Jewish Leadership Council threatening a judicial review against Met Police Gold Commander Adam Slonecki—a senior officer with overall strategic authority over the January 18 protest—if he failed to act.

This threat came to light during the six-day trial. Slonecki responded by banning protesters from meeting near the BBC, using the slanderous pretext that a synagogue in the vicinity could be endangered.

Utilizing Section 12(3) Public Order Act 1986, substantial parts of London were sealed off including roads off Whitehall, off Trafalgar Square, including a

huge area around Portland Place where the BBC is located.

The Met demanded, just 24 hours before the protest was to begin, that its location be shifted again, allowing only a static rally confined to Whitehall.

Under these conditions, Jamal stated from the rally stage that a delegation of coalition leaders would walk peacefully toward the BBC to lay flowers in protest at the broadcaster's coverage of the Gaza slaughter. His words, for which he is now convicted of criminal incitement, were: "We will walk peacefully, we will walk in silence. If the police stop us, which they probably will, we will lay those flowers at the feet of the police force to mark their complicity in supporting genocide by suppressing protest against that genocide."

After reaching a first line of officers blocking Trafalgar Square, the marchers expected to be stopped. Instead, police invited them to continue and filtered them through. On reaching a second line the marchers were halted by police. During this time, Nineham himself was violently arrested by a 10-man police snatch squad. He was among 77 protesters arrested that day (65 for "breach of conditions [on the protest]" and five for "public order offences").

Jamal was not arrested on the day, but was told to attend a police station, following which he was subsequently charged.

As Nineham noted outside court, "It is extraordinary that we are being criminalised, have been convicted, for following police advice."

The Met operation was aimed at intimidating the hundreds of thousands who had been regularly demonstrating against the genocide and opposing the government's attacks on democratic rights. Two other speakers at the rally—who also proceeded down Whitehall—were former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and his former shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, still a Labour MP. Both were told subsequently to attend a police station for interview. Other STWC officers who had to attend a police interview were Lindsey German, Alex Kenny and Andrew Murray.

The police said following their mass round-up at the January 18 protest that there was "a coordinated effort to breach Public Order Act conditions"—a position challenged in court by Nineham and Jamal.

In his statement outside Westminster Court, Jamal noted that they had not been afforded a fair trial: "Consider these two basic facts: six days were allocated for this case; the judge allowed the prosecution to take four days

to make their case and did not allow any additional time for defence submissions. It was never proved that we offered any threat to the synagogue or to anyone worshipping at a synagogue."

Of their peaceful protest, he explained, "We led a symbolic walk. We made clear that, if we were stopped by police, we would lay flowers at their feet. The police told us to filter through and we stopped when we reached the second police line. Chris was violently arrested — the only violence that occurred that day. We will not allow this to distract us from the reasons we have been campaigning on the streets."

The PSC leader said their conviction was in the context of the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians and the Starmer government's backing it: "Yesterday, Israel became the world's first state to enact a law which mandates execution only for people of one ethnic background. Even apartheid South Africa did not have such a law, but still our government offers Israel diplomatic, economic, political, and military support. And instead of ending its complicity, it devotes its energy to bringing in even further laws to repress the right to protest. It will not work. We will not be silenced."

In a parallel chilling development, the day prior to the main part of Nineham and Jamal's trial, the Met issued a March 25 statement, warning: "The Metropolitan Police has revised the enforcement approach officers will take in response to displays of support for Palestine Action, which is a proscribed organisation under the Terrorism Act." Stating that "Anyone showing support for the group is likely to be arrested," the Met declared, "This is a change from an interim position adopted following last month's High Court judgment which indicated that while officers would identify and gather evidence of offences, arrests would be unlikely."

Deputy Assistant Commissioner James Harman stated, "We have determined that while Palestine Action remains proscribed and support for it remains unlawful under the Terrorism Act, we must continue to enforce the law and this is likely to involve the arrest of those committing offences."



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