

Five hundred more pro-Palestine protesters arrested in UK despite High Court ruling

Thomas Scripps
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Another 523 arrests were made in Britain on Saturday of people carrying placards with the words: “I oppose genocide; I support Palestine Action”.

The protesters were participating in Saturday’s “Everyone” demonstration in Trafalgar Square, London, organised by civil liberties organisation Defend Our Juries, challenging the ban on direct action group Palestine Action. Their ages ranging from 18 to 87 years old, demonstrators were all arrested under counter-terror laws on suspicion of indicating support for a proscribed organisation.

Over 3,300 people have now been arrested on these charges during various since Palestine Action was outlawed by the Labour government in June-July last year.

The latest mass roundup takes place *after* the UK’s High Court has ruled the proscription of Palestine Action unlawful. The government’s appeal is due to be heard this month, on April 28 and 29 and the arrests are clearly meant to back an overturn of the original verdict.

A Defend Our Juries spokesperson commented, “The Met are choosing to make arrests despite the government’s ban on the group being ruled unlawful by the High Court, and leading lawyers warning that any arrests would be unlawful.”

This criticism was echoed by Tom Southerden, Amnesty International UK’s Law and Human Rights Director, who said, “Today’s mass arrests of peaceful protesters in Trafalgar Square under UK terrorism law are yet another blow to civil liberties in this country—and made all the more outrageous by the Metropolitan Police’s own U-turn.

“The High Court ruled in February that the proscription of Palestine Action was unlawful. The Met rightly said it would stop making arrests.”

The about turn took place on March 25, with the Met issuing a statement claiming it had only paused arrests while it became clear whether the government would be granted the right to appeal.

In fact, the right to appeal was granted on February 25. The reversal a full month later was a political decision, prompted by the Labour government, aimed at inflaming the situation to support its case in the Court of Appeal.

In line with this objective, the Met claimed ahead of Saturday’s protest, “At previous events linked to this group we have seen coordinated attempts to disrupt police activity, including obstructing officers and, at times, verbal or physical abuse.”

Defend Our Juries responded: “More Met lies. There has not been a single instance of prosecution among our supporter base relating to ‘obstructing officers’ or ‘verbal or physical abuse’. Our actions are peaceful, dignified (from our side, at least) and completely nonviolent.”

Labour will also have been eager to reinvigorate its crackdown under conditions in which the United States and Israel are waging illegal wars against Iran and Lebanon overwhelmingly opposed in the population.

Among those in Trafalgar Square on Saturday to show their support were recently released Palestine Action hunger strikers: Quesser Zurah, Heba Muraisi and Kamran Ahmed.

They are members of the Filton 24, all recently found not guilty of aggravated burglary charges in connection with an action against Israeli arms manufacturer Elbit Systems, though still facing trial on other charges. Twelve of them—including Zurah, Muraisi and Ahmed—were released on bail.

All three took part in a hunger strike against their extraordinary and punitive detention. They are

considering taking action against the prison authorities for their ill treatment.

Two weeks ago, Zurah was arrested again, this time by masked police officers in a dawn raid on her home, apparently over an Instagram post and allegations that she called for direct action.

Police said she was arrested under Section 44 of the Serious Crimes Act, encouraging others to commit crimes, and Section 1 of the Terrorism Act, encouraging others to commit acts of terrorism. Zurah appeared at Westminster Magistrates Court and was released on bail.

She told reporters on Saturday, “As former prisoners and hunger strikers, one of the main reasons of today is to defeat the exact purpose of the state for locking us up for 15 months,” adding, “We believe that the ones that create the weapons and use them to bomb children, mothers, women and men that only dream of freedom, they are the terrorists. The ones raging a regional genocide are the terrorists.”

Fellow hunger striker Heba Muraisi said of the arrests, “It’s crazy actually witnessing it. It’s both insane and disgusting. Look how many police are here, just for elderly people holding placards.”

Among those arrested was Robert Del Naja, frontman for the internationally renowned trip hop collective Massive Attack. The band has been prominent in its defence of the Palestinians and opposition to the censorship of protest against the Gaza genocide.

Del Naja told reporters, “Being a musician, obviously, there was a lot of trepidation around how we might not be able to travel and get visas. But I thought ‘this is ridiculous’ and then the police making that U-turn to arrest people again, I thought that is even more ridiculous.

“So I’m going to hold a sign today. If I get arrested, I feel very confident that if I stand up in court with the right guidance and say ‘this was an unlawful arrest and, therefore, I don’t accept it’.”

The hundreds of arrests made at the weekend confirm that the Labour government is determined to proceed with its criminalisation of pro-Palestinian protest, despite the setbacks resulting from popular opposition. It is concerned with the law only insofar as it can weaponise it against democratic rights in pursuit of its political censorship.

Amnesty’s Tom Southernden commented bluntly:

“This is not policing. This is the state criminalising dissent.

“Peaceful protest is a fundamental right. People are understandably outraged by the ongoing genocide in Gaza and entitled under international human rights law to express their horror. These protesters were not inciting violence. They were holding signs. Arresting them as terrorists is not just disproportionate—it is absurd.”



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