

# UK Labour government bars Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker from entering the country

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The Labour government has banned two prominent American political commentators, Cenk Uygur and Hasan Piker from entering Britain to attend speaking engagements at prominent events in London and Oxford. The decision by Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood marks an escalation in the suppression of any criticism of Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Both had their Electronic Travel Authorisations (ETAs)—normally valid for up to six months—revoked on the grounds that their presence “may not be conducive to the public good”. The real reason is that Uygur and Piker are prominent opponents of Israel's ongoing genocide—which has claimed over 72,500 lives by official numbers, likely many more.

Uygur, the Turkish-American co-host of the YouTube channel The Young Turks—which has over 6 million subscribers and attracts more than 200 million monthly views—had been scheduled to speak at the University of Oxford and the SXSW London (South by Southwest London) festival in Shoreditch. Piker, his nephew and a Twitch streamer with 2.6 million followers on the site, and over 11 million social media overall, was booked to appear at the same festival.

Uygur was scheduled to be part of the SXSW discussion: “Techno-Feudalism Is Here. Who Are The Lords?” He was advertised for the event in Oxford as being “known for his incisive anti-establishment, left-wing, and populist political commentary and activism”. Piker was featured to speak at an SXSW event called “How The American Left Learned To Speak The Internet”.

Significantly, Piker was set to meet with the leaders of two political parties in Britain, also prominent critics of Israel's genocide. Middle East Eye (MEE) reported, “Piker was scheduled to meet Green Party leader Zack Polanski and former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn in Britain before being denied entry by the Home Office...” Piker “was set to appear on Polanski's podcast, Bold Politics.”

MEE revealed that “Corbyn, the parliamentary leader of the left-wing Your Party and one of Britain's most

prominent politicians, was scheduled to appear alongside Piker in an interview before the podcaster had his travel authorisation revoked.”

Speaking to MEE, Oxford Union President Arwa Elrayess said, “These events had been publicly announced for months, making this last-minute decision all the more troubling. She added, “To this day, we defend freedom of speech; the right for our invited speakers to express themselves, and to be challenged, irrespective of political viewpoint.” In opposition to the censorship, Elrayess confirmed the organisation “is exploring all available options to ensure the discussion takes place, including hosting it online”.

Uygur has regularly visited Britain, appearing on television and radio shows. Only last year he took part in a Q&A at the Cambridge Union. Uygur only discovered he was banned from Britain while attempting to board a flight from the US to London. He posted on X, “The mighty United Kingdom is afraid of speech that shows you who's responsible for war crimes. But no amount of censorship will get us to stop telling the truth.”

Piker replied to Uygur, “The UK has revoked my visa as well. All at the behest of Israel. The west is betraying ‘liberal values’ for a genocidal fascist foreign government.”

The WSWs demands the ban on Uygur and Piker is overturned. Their exclusion from the UK is an attack on democratic rights that also lays the pretext for the banning not only political opponents of genocide, but all those opposing imperialist war and carnage anywhere in the world.

The bans stemmed from demands from right-wing Labourites and Zionists, who deployed the now standard lie to conflate opposition to the fascistic Israeli government and its genocide of the Palestinians with antisemitism and terrorism.

Labour MP David Taylor, who publicly thanked Mahmood after the decision was announced, called the previous week for Piker and Ughur to be barred from entry. He said of Piker, “It's shocking that SXSW would invite someone who has openly supported a proscribed terrorist organisation [a

reference to Hamas] and spouted these kinds of vile antisemitic rants to speak at their festival.”

Taylor’s record includes supporting the counter-terror ban on direct action group Palestine Action and refusing to back a letter calling for sanctions against Israel. In January 2025, he was the sole member of Parliament’s International Development Select Committee to vote against a report the body authored which concluded “there is a plausible risk that Israel’s military campaign in Gaza may have included grave violations of international humanitarian law, which has given rise to accusations of genocide”.

In April 2025, Taylor called on the Glastonbury Festival to drop Irish rap group Kneecap—prominent opponents of Israel’s genocide—from its 2025 lineup.

The Zionist Community Security Trust (CST) publicly lobbied SXSW, calling on organisers to “act responsibly” and not allow the UK to become a “platform” for Piker. It stated, “At a time of record levels of antisemitism in the UK, it is vital that all institutions, including event organisers, act responsibly and consider the potential impact of this kind of rhetoric.”

In April, Mahmood launched a taskforce to identify “extremists” who were planning to come to the UK, so she could ban them before they travel. She was able to rely on an apparatus of censorship and repression put in place by successive Conservative and Labour governments in the name of the “war on terror” since 2001.

The first moves were made against far-right forces, with 11 individuals banned from attending a rally in May organised by the fascist Tommy Robinson. As is now clear, this was a trial run normalising political exclusion and censorship before utilising it against the left, particularly opponents of genocide and war.

This is the latest stage in an offensive by Tory and Labour governments on those who oppose Israel’s slaughter of the Palestinians and who expose British and American complicity in Israeli war crimes.

Britain’s anti-democratic action is part of an international crackdown. The WSWS reported in May 2025 that Piker was detained and interrogated by Customs and Border Protection agents at Chicago’s O’Hare Airport after returning from France. He was travelling to a speaking engagement at the University of Chicago.

We noted that the violation of Piker’s democratic rights was “part of the Trump administration’s escalating efforts to intimidate critics of US foreign policy and suppress opposition to imperialist wars, particularly Israel’s genocide in Gaza.”

The coordination of this repression across governments of nominally different political complexions reveals its class character. The suppression of anti-war speech is a political

offensive being rammed through by the ruling class and all its political representatives internationally.

The WSWS has irreconcilable political differences with Uygur—who attempted to be the Democrat nominee in the 2024 US presidential election—and Piker. The fact that individuals who operate entirely within the political orbit of the Democratic Party can no longer be allowed a public platform in the UK, due to their speaking out on a genocide actively opposed by tens of millions internationally, shows that no criticism of the ruling elite’s backing of genocide can be permitted, however circumscribed.

Following his ban, Uygur noted on his YouTube channel that “Over 60 percent of Americans are critical of Israel. Will we all be banned from the UK?”

The WSWS has documented a series of state attacks on journalists under both the Tories and Labour.

In October 2024, Asa Winstanley, associate editor of *The Electronic Intifada*, had his north London home raided before dawn by approximately 10 police officers acting under the Terrorism Act 2006. His electronic devices were seized without charge.

Richard Medhurst was arrested at Heathrow under the Terrorism Act in August 2024. Sarah Wilkinson was arrested at her home by counter-terrorism officers shortly afterwards and pressured—she refused—to hand over her contacts in Gaza.

In May 2023, *The Grayzone* journalist Kit Klarenberg was detained by UK counter-terrorism police at Luton Airport on May 17, after he arrived from Belgrade, Serbia where he lives.

Since Palestine Action was banned in July 2025, police have used counter-terrorism laws to arrest more than 3,300 people simply for holding signs that read, “I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.” The government is now seeking to overturn a High Court ruling that declared the ban unlawful and “disproportionate.”



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