

Mass arrests of 150 Palestine Action protesters at UK Labour Party conference, as total nears 4,000

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Repression of anti-Gaza genocide protests took another leap at the Labour Party conference in Liverpool on Sunday, confirming that Prime Minister Andy Burnham's government is continuing the pro-Zionist and pro-war agenda of his predecessor, Keir Starmer.

Merseyside Police arrested more than 150 people, the vast majority of those peacefully protesting. This brings the total arrests since the undemocratic proscription last year of Palestine Action under anti-terror legislation to almost 4,000.

Those detained were arrested for carrying signs reading, "I support Palestine Action" and "I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action," under Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000, which makes it a crime to support a proscribed organisation. Escalated charges under Sections 11 and 12, covering membership and inviting support, carry sentences of up to 14 years.

The protest, organised by Defend Our Juries (DOJ) as part of its Lift the Ban campaign, assembled within sight of the ACC Liverpool conference centre where Labour was opening its first conference with Burnham as Labour leader. Defend Our Juries said 195 people took part.

More than a dozen protesters were arrested two hours into the demonstration. By 8:02 p.m., Merseyside Police stated that "more than 50 people" had been arrested. Defend our Juries reported that police were still making arrests at midnight, with protesters being "held in a police kettle for 13 hrs."

On Monday, DOJ issued a statement that as of "5am this morning, after over 150 arrests on terrorism charges and a stand off that lasted over 16 hours, MerseyPolice left a group of people outside the Labour Party Conference still displaying their 'terrorist' signs." Their accompanying photos showed just eight people holding five signs.

Those seized were overwhelmingly elderly. Among them was Margaret Owen OBE, 94, a human rights barrister. Medics, clergy and disabled people using mobility aids sat among the pensioners.

The arrests began the previous day, when Robert Del Naja, frontman for the internationally renowned trip hop collective Massive Attack, was detained outside the venue. Video footage showed a police officer stating that Del Naja was committing an offence for holding a sign defending Palestine Action. Del Naja replied: "I don't recognise the offence, though, because under UK law it is actually an offence to aid and abet any private individual or company aiding and abetting genocidal war crimes."

It was Del Naja's second arrest this year for the same offence. On April 11, he was among 523 people arrested by the Metropolitan Police in a single day at Trafalgar Square, at a mass vigil.

Del Naja had appeared in a pre-recorded video with Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori and human rights barrister Michael Mansfield KC, addressed directly to Burnham. "Today, in modern Britain, desperate citizens are being arrested, prosecuted and jailed for terrorism. For terrorism," the three said.

"Some for holding placards peacefully in silence, others for dismantling lethal drones destined for the civilian population of Gaza. Under UK law, it is an offence for any identity, private or commercial, to aid and abet war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. We ask you to stop what is obviously wrong. Deproscribe Palestine Action."

Del Naja shared a platform with Burnham (then Mayor of Greater Manchester) in 2025 in support of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, where Burnham praised his "clarity and leadership." Now 18 months later, he is dragged off a pavement under terrorism legislation

outside the conference headed by Burnham.

Over 3,700 had been arrested prior to the weekend for peacefully supporting Palestine Action since it was designated a terrorist organisation in July 2025. Home Office figures recorded 2,819 such arrests in Great Britain in the year to March 2026, of which 484 produced charges. Arrests had already resumed under Burnham on July 30 (10 days after he took office), when at least 50 people were detained outside Westminster Magistrates' Court.

Defend Our Juries spokesman Tim Crosland told the *Morning Star*: "This is the first major sign holding action since Andy Burnham became PM. And it is a pretty clear reminder that nothing has really changed..."

Kerry Moscogiuri, chief executive of Amnesty International UK, called the arrests "of grandparents, teenagers and everyone in between for holding placards outside the Labour Party conference... a truly shameful attack on freedom of speech."

Palestine Action was proscribed by the Starmer government after activists entered the Royal Air Force (RAF) Brize Norton base and damaged two Voyager aircraft in protest at British complicity in the Gaza genocide. The High Court ruled the proscription unlawful in February 2026, but the Court of Appeal overturned that ruling in June, and police immediately resumed mass arrests.

In July, the Supreme Court granted Ammori limited permission for a further appeal, listed for November 4 and 5. Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood, kept in the post by Burnham, said the government will "robustly defend this appeal."

The Burnham government is backing the genocide in Gaza and criminalising opposition to it at home every bit as brutally as Starmer, despite Burnham's crocodile tears.

On July 9, shortly before taking office, he posted a video declaring, "Labour's initial response to the treatment of Gaza caused huge hurt. We got it wrong and I am sorry for that." He has never described Israel's mass murder of the Palestinians as genocide, saying only that there is "increasing evidence that war crimes appear to have been committed" but any determination is a matter for international courts.

Meanwhile Burnham is escalating Britain's military role in the Middle East region as well as in Europe against Russia.

Departing for the UN General Assembly, he announced September 21 his authorisation of a RAF Voyager plane

to refuel Saudi fighter jets attacking the Houthis in Yemen—the first military deployment of his premiership.

The mass arrests also exposed the professions of sympathy for the Palestinians made by Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband, who was portrayed by figures such as ex-Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and various pseudo-left groups as someone who would hold Burnham to his "conscience".

Miliband told the House of Commons on September 8 that he would place limited sanctions on trade with Israeli settlements as there was "ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in areas of the West Bank", perpetrated by "settler terrorists." However, he immediately added that this would remain "unwavering in my support for the State of Israel," adding that Israel "has every right to defend itself".

Stepped-up war demands state repression. In his speech to the United Nations General Assembly last week, Burnham announced a new National Centre for Information Defence. This would bring together intelligence agencies, law enforcement and social media companies with a remit to "detect, attribute and disrupt" hostile information attacks, warning of "an insidious campaign that reaches into people's homes... stoking division and sowing despair."

Presented as a shield against Russian bots, such a body will be turned against dissent at home. Opposition to war, to austerity, to the genocide in Gaza can all be recast as a foreign-sponsored "narrative of decline."

The fight to lift the ban on Palestine Action, to secure the dropping of all charges against those arrested and to oppose genocide and war demands above all the independent political mobilisation of the working class against the Labour government and the capitalist system it defends.



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