

Sally Rooney's books withdrawn from UK sale to avoid prosecution over Palestine Action

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The Labour government's anti-democratic proscription of Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation has led to the withdrawal from sale in the UK of books by Sally Rooney, to avoid repression of her protest against the genocide in Gaza.

A bestselling and award-winning Irish novelist, Rooney pledged to give royalties and earnings from her considerable UK sales to Palestine Action. This exposed her and her publisher to prosecution under the Terrorism Act 2000—the same legislation used to criminalise PA—for giving financial aid to a proscribed group.

Under “circumstances where Faber cannot pass on UK earnings to Sally Rooney for her work,” the publisher said, they had mutually agreed to the withdrawal of her books from UK sale.

Others can be targeted. Responding to Adam Boulton's accusation on Sky News that Rooney's actions were “anti-Jewish,” the journalist and author Sarah Helm tweeted, “God help us authors who support Palestine and Palestine Action. Sounds like Adam would have all our books swept off the shelves in a jiffy.”

Helm, the author of *Gaza: The Long Road to Destruction, 1870-2024* (2025) who has also interviewed Zionists critical of its settlement project, is the wife of Jonathan Powell. Powell served as adviser on national security, foreign policy and intelligence to both Keir Starmer and Andy Burnham. Following demands by Zionist groups, she is now being investigated by the Metropolitan Police “to determine whether any further police investigation may be required.”

Downing Street responded by declaring, “These views are held by an individual who does not represent the government in any capacity.”

Baroness Jacqui Smith, Minister of State for Skills, said the “very careful process... the Home Office went through” in proscribing Palestine Action “has consequences. This is one of those consequences.”

Smith was explicit that this was political censorship, and the Labour Party remains committed to it. Discussing Rooney's books, she said the government's first responsibility is to the security of the country.”

Palestine Action was proscribed by Keir Starmer's government after activists entered an RAF base and spray-

painted two military aircraft to protest British complicity in the Gaza genocide. Then Home Secretary Yvette Cooper announced the ban in June 2025, making it a criminal offence to be a member of or express support for the group. The former “crime” carries up to a 14-year sentence.

Banning Palestine Action, a group principally targeting Israeli military supplier Elbit Systems, was aimed at deterring all opposition to the genocide and Labour's complicity. Thousands were arrested, most for peacefully holding placards reading “I oppose genocide. I support Palestine Action.” Under section 13 of the 2000 Terrorism Act, this carries a potential sentence of six months' imprisonment. Arrests continued even during a judicial review into the decision.

Rooney has been a principled opponent of the Gaza genocide and the repression of opposition to it. She compared Israeli forces firing on an aid distribution site with Palestine Action's protest action: “One of these actions involved the intentional use of lethal violence against civilians, resulting in the deaths of 23 loved and irreplaceable human beings. The other involved no violence against any living things and resulted in no deaths or injuries. The UK government has now announced its intention to deal with one of these incidents as a terrorist offence. Guess which.”

In February 2026, the High Court ruled the proscription unlawful and disproportionate. Rooney hailed the judgment as a “victory for civil liberties.”

The High Court judges, however, rejected proscription only because the group's actions had “not yet reached the level, scale and persistence” to justify it, opening the way for a government appeal. The Court of Appeal overturned the High Court decision in June, reinstating the proscription. It defended deference to the Home Secretary on matters of “terrorism” or “national security.”

Palestine Action co-founder Huda Ammori called this “one of the most extreme attacks on free speech and the right to protest in modern British history.”

More arrests followed, including at the Labour Party's conference. Almost 4,000 people to date have been arrested. Burnham is as committed as his predecessor to war and repression.

When the ban was imposed, Rooney wrote of her “intention

to go on supporting Palestine Action, which is not a proscribed or otherwise prohibited group here in the Republic of Ireland.” She pledged to donate royalties and earnings from UK sales and television adaptations to the group. If that made her open to prosecution for supporting terrorism, she added, “so be it”.

Rooney is a major internationally recognised author. Her second novel, *Normal People* (2018), has sold more than 1 million copies in the UK alone. It won the Costa Book Award, Irish Novel of the Year in the Irish Book Awards (which named her Author of the Year in 2024), and Encore Award, amongst others. It was adapted into an award-winning BBC Three/Hulu miniseries, as was her novel *Conversations with Friends* (2017).

Her books are a major part of Faber’s income. Last year, her titles accounted for just over 10 percent of UK money spent on Faber books. Even without any new publication this year, her books have constituted nearly 5 percent of Faber’s takings in UK bookshops.

That she can be targeted in this way shows that no one is safe.

Rooney has always recognised possible repercussions. In September 2025, she cancelled a trip to London to accept the Sky Arts Award for Literature for *Intermezzo* (2024), amid concerns she could be arrested for supporting Palestine Action. Last November, in a witness statement to the High Court, she warned that her existing books could disappear from British bookshops and she might be unable to publish new work in the UK. That is now happening.

She is not being threatened over the content of her books, but over her opposition to genocide. Ahead of the proscription, she wrote of the implications of using the Terrorism Act: “[M]ere membership of the group would constitute a crime. In fact, even supporting the group purely in words – as I am doing now – could also constitute a serious legal offence... Financial dealings with members and supporters may also be illegal, even if the individuals concerned have done nothing against the law other than belong to or express support for a protest movement.”

She noted that the Act’s definition was vague enough to include property damage, even in the absence of any threat to human life. “If the government proceeds down this path,” she warned, “any ordinary person in the UK could in theory be sent to prison simply for expressing verbal support for non-violent activism. Quite aside from the broader principle, this would represent an alarming curtailment of free speech.”

Rooney wrote before proscription that “I admire and support Palestine Action wholeheartedly—and I will continue to, whether that becomes a terrorist offence or not.” She has now written, “I have made every effort to be honest with the public about my beliefs and intentions, and I am wholly prepared to accept the consequences.”

Those consequences have involved cutting off her income from British companies by threatening them with the same legislation. Last November, she said the production company

behind her BBC productions had warned they could not legally pay her royalties if she was using them to support Palestine Action.

Facing the same threat, Faber said the legislation had “led to circumstances where Faber cannot pass on UK earnings to Sally Rooney for her work.”

“To sell a writer’s work and not be able to pass on earnings is an unconscionable situation for a publisher,” they said, so “we have taken the decision that we can no longer supply her works in the UK in any format. We remain the proud publisher of her remarkable body of work, which we will continue to sell in other territories.”

Rooney explained that “the fulfilment of contracts to publish my work in the UK could now constitute a serious criminal offence. After a process of consultation and deliberation, and with my full agreement, my publisher Faber has therefore determined that it can no longer supply my work within the UK.”

Booksellers can sell remaining stock, but this is effectively a ban.

Ammori said, “Sally Rooney being unable to publish her work in the UK marks a new low in the escalating assault on free speech caused by the proscription of Palestine Action.”

She continued “A world-renowned author fearing arrest and being forced to remove her books from our bookstores, exposes the chilling consequences of this authoritarian law, which has been used to make over 3,700 arrests for simply holding seven-word signs.” (There have been more arrests since).

Index on Censorship’s Jemimah Steinfeld said, “We have already seen how the proscription of Palestine Action has infringed on our freedom to protest and now we are seeing it infringe on our freedom to read. This comes the week after Banned Books Week, revealing another threat to the UK’s publishing industry.”

The government is placing culture at the mercy of its criminal policies, which are coming into conflict with an increased determination to speak out against genocide and war. Sally Rooney’s case points to the threats levelled against artists and their livelihoods.

It takes this form with Rooney because of her explicit financial support for Palestine Action, but the threat will be extended to any who speaks out, including prominent musicians like Robert Del Naja of Massive Attack, Brian Eno, Bob Vylan and Kneecap. Forcing through the government’s ferocious agenda in the face of such criticism makes economic sanctions against cultural opponents ever more likely as a weapon of class rule.



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