

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article9124>



Britain

# Labour, tough on Grannies, easy on genocide

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP607 - August 2025 -

Publication date: Wednesday 13 August 2025

---

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights  
reserved

---

## **Dave Kellaway reports on the protests on Palestine and the proscription of Palestine Action last weekend.**

Some of those arrested were in their nineties and could barely walk to the police vans. Some were in wheelchairs and one was blind. All you had to do to get arrested was to write on a blank placard: "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action". The location of the protest was well chosen. It took place in Parliament Square, in front of the statues of Gandhi and the suffragist Millicent Fawcett who took forms of non-violent direct action.

Protesters who lay down to be taken away had between 5 and 6 officers carrying them out. Police were attempting to be careful not to repeat the bruising they gave to protesters at earlier events. Somebody on Facebook even quipped that if there are police redundancies down the line they could easily retrain as carers!

It was the largest number arrested in a single day protest for decades. Police were bussed in from Wales. You wonder how their absence elsewhere affected crime rates.

Some of those arrested adopted the default English cultural posture of being polite and queuing calmly. Nearly all had never been arrested in their lives. There were doctors, nurses, teachers, young people and even a former commando and military attaché. Over half were pensioners. People declared simply they were against genocide, taking a stand for democratic rights to protest and were in no way terrorists or supporters of terrorism.

Charlie Kimber – former editor of Socialist Worker – gave a very eloquent filmed speech outlining the politics of it all and was marched off holding a flower. Moazzam Begg, wrongly imprisoned Guantanamo Bay prisoner, was arrested. Bianca Jagger was there but was not arrested.

All around seven hundred or so brave protesters accepted the risk of arrest as many others shouted their support and called down shame on the police. Every moment was recorded on social media and by much of mainstream media. There is no way Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, can run from these damning images being shown around the world. Video clips stay with people much more than politicians' speeches.

## **Palestine solidarity has mass support**

Once again it looks like Labour are underestimating the strength and creativity of the Palestine solidarity movement. It thought that once they finally called for a mealy mouthed conditional ceasefire and wrung their hands about a humanitarian crisis then the movement would subside. Another huge solidarity march (the 30th) of well over a hundred thousand happening at the same time as the Parliament square protest proved how the Labour government has miscalculated badly.

At the beginning of the Palestine Action protest the Met triumphantly said only a hundred or so had turned up as against the scheduled 500 organised by Defend our Juries. In the end there were 700 and since the official arrests numbered around 450 clearly a lot of terrorist sympathizers shamefully managed to get away with it!

Sir Peter Fahy, an ex-police chief, asked recently: 'How have we got into a situation where we are arresting elderly

women for holding a protest sign?’ The fact police in other regions have not implemented an arrest policy for similar protests – well-known writer George Monbiot avoided arrest in Somerset – shows that Cooper could be in trouble.

Many eminent lawyers and other intellectuals have signed open letters denouncing the proscribing of Palestine Action. Legal specialists suggest that Palestine Action could win their judicial review. This also depends on the degree of active resistance and mass disquiet displayed before the November court date. It will not be the first time that a part of the state steps in to clear up a mess caused by government overreach.

## What was behind Yvette Cooper’s decision

The proscription of Palestine Action (PA) was not a whim on the part of the Home Secretary. A senior General in the British Army got into the Lords and acquired a post with a US company heavily involved with the Israeli Defence Force lobbied the government to deal with PA. He went so far as directly contacting the Welsh police over a PA action against an arms factory in Wales.

Luke Akehurst, now a Labour MP but a staunch pro Israel campaigner who led the We Believe in Israel group, organised two reports attempting to link PA with Hamas aligned groups internationally. He claimed it had received Iranian funding. He called for its proscription early on. Elbit arms company representatives have also [directly lobbied](#) the government. Former Labour MP and Labour Friends of Israel supporter, John Woodcock, now in the Lords as a cross bencher with the title Lord Walney, called for PA proscription last May.

Apart from this direct pressure there is the general political alignment of the Starmer government with US policy on Gaza – despite recent adjustments given the mass solidarity campaign and internal Labour unease. If you think Israel has a right to any form of self defence, including genocide, then it is logical to provide it with arms and to stop those arms factories getting sabotaged in any way.

At the same time the Starmer strategy has been to win back support from its right, from Reform particularly. Looking soft on direct action activists like PA would only play into Farage’s hands according to this strategy.

Also Starmer and Cooper know that the so-called soft left which revolted over the disabled Personal Independence Payments were not minded to defend the right to protest in the same way, only 26 MPs voted against and only half were Labour. To make sure she won the motion she bundled the proscription of two outright fascist groups into the same parliamentary vote.

However reporters are suggesting there are rumblings now among Labour Mps on the effects of the proscription. Those scenes in Parliament Square are not being digested well – especially by MPs vulnerable to an independent Left and/or Green challenge in their seats.

Cooper has had to directly respond to the scale of the protest, issuing statements before and after the Saturday arrests. She has to continually wave the old flag of security assessments that we cannot release to the general public at this stage. You would have thought she would have done that at the previous legal stage when the government lost the attempt to block a judicial review.

## Defend our Juries statement

It is worth quoting the statement from Tim Crosland of [Defend Our Juries](#), the organizers of Saturday's protests:

The context is so horrific it doesn't seem right to say it's gone well – but we had more people than we expected. We are not going away.

First thoughts are for all those arrested, by the Met's count, 474. Trusting that everyone is ok, and that support systems are holding up. Every courageous one of you, sparking the spirit of resistance to genocide, in Britain and beyond.

And then for all our brothers and sisters in Gaza, knowing this is not enough, and will never be enough, but promising you that we will keep going and growing our collective power, and will never avert our gaze, and never allow ourselves to be bystanders.

And a huge thank you to everyone supporting this action, with calling, care-taking, briefing calls, nonviolence training, press and spokes work and practice, and the many diverse elements that combine for an action on this scale.

We don't get everything right, but the trust, love and commitment from every single person taking part has been phenomenal!

We're only getting started. We are already planning our next steps and will have news on the next phase of action very shortly. In the meantime you can sign up [here](#).

We've been so many wonderful messages of support, but just sharing some words from an 86 year-old, who left Parliament Square yesterday at 2.20 unarrested, with many others, after holding an "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action" sign:

"I have taken part in many political demonstrations over the last 70 years (I am 86), but I cannot think of anything comparable to today, both in its social and political importance for Britain, or in terms of the human price being paid for government complicity in genocide ... the atmosphere on the grass (literally) was deeply caring and human. Good wishes and profound thanks".

The weakness of Labour MPs on this is marked – a very small number voted against proscription in parliament – a fraction of those who stood up to Starmer on the PIPs cuts.

The Observer reports that some Labour MPs are getting queasy about the law now and suggest it is over reach – i.e. That the proscription is not necessarily wrong but getting all these pensioners and liberal professionals arrested is not a good look for the Labour government.

Defend the right to democratic protest

This issue is not particularly a right versus left question at the moment. The vast majority of British people can see that pensioners holding handwritten signs are not terrorists or their supporters. They very much doubt that Yvette Cooper has proof that PA are like Al Qaeda or ISIS. Their own eyes show that the law is looking like an ass. They

can see that the government is in a minority when it comes to policy on Gaza and the Palestinians.

However, following the events on Saturday a few people on the left – such as Tariq Ali – have suggested that the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and its coalition partners should have called on the hundred thousand or so demonstrators to go down to Parliament square and surround the PA protest in support.

This might sound a good idea until you think about it . It is true that there have been some tensions politically between the PSC and PA and these can be discussed. Nevertheless bringing tens of thousands down to Parliament square could have negatively affected the dignified and powerful non-violent resistance of the protesters there and invited the Met to intervene against the demonstrators.

It might also have led to further legal action against the leaders of the mass solidarity campaign. Already some of them are facing legal action for a previous demonstration. It is not a question of either the mass demo or the non-violent direct action. Both are important and complement one another.

Speakers at the demo, like Lindsay German, expressed her solidarity with the people taking a stand in Parliament Square. There may come a time for different tactics but if anything the momentum at the moment is with the people challenging the PA proscription. Our campaign is not isolated:

Volker Türk, UN human rights chief, has stated that “[the proscription of Palestine Action] appears to constitute an impermissible restriction on those rights that is at odds with the UK’s obligations under international human rights law.”

11 August 2025

Source: [Anti\\*Capitalist Resistance](#).

PS:

*If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint.* Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.