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Palestine solidarity

Solidarity with Gaza is not antisemitic - Death to hypocrisy

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The mass movement for solidarity with the population of Gaza and of Palestine worldwide is labelled antisemitic and subject to repression both collectively by the banning of Palestine solidarity organizations (Palestine Action in Britain labelled as terrorist, threat of dissolution against Urgence Palestine in France for example) and against individuals including many academics sacked for denouncing the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

One of latest episodes is around the major Glastonbury Music Festival in Britain. The pro-Palestine Belfast rap group Kneecap was already stigmatized by being banned from the BBC's livestream of the event. However the duo Bob Vylan was on the live stream so their chant of "Death to the IDF" taken up by the crowd was broadcast live. This has provoked great furore with calls for the sacking of the BBC chair, police investigations, questions in parliament. Meanwhile the genocide continues and provokes far less condemnation. [IVP]

Anti*Capitalist Resistance's Dave Kellaway explains how the establishment, the Labour government and the mainstream media have responded to the chant of Death to the IDF following the prosecution of a Kneecap member and the definition of Palestine Action as a terrorist organization.

The *Daily Mail*, the BBC, Lisa Nandy (minister for Culture) and most of the mainstream media have called for action against the musician, Bobby Vylan for antisemitic hate speech for his now notorious chant of Death to the IDF (Israeli Defence Force). In fact the *Mail* lies and libels Vylan on its front page by saying he called for death to Israelis.

Who is being antisemitic here?

To claim 'death to the IDF' is antisemitic is itself antisemitic according to at least two of the examples of antisemitism provided in the IHRA working definition of antisemitism. This states antisemitism includes:

- *Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.*
- *Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.*

Bob Vylan has never suggested that Jews as a people are responsible for the wrongdoing of the IDF or that Jews are collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel. If he had said death to Jews or to Israelis then a line would have been crossed. He did not.

Many Jewish people outside Israel say the IDF in no way represents Jewish people as it shoots hundreds who queue for food at its military controlled food distribution sites and its bombings are killing tens of thousands of children. A minority of Jewish people inside Israel also oppose what the IDF is doing. Jewish people opposed to the genocide vehemently reject making them in anyway responsible for what the IDF is doing in Gaza and the West Bank. [1] They say, Not in Our Name.

All through its history, the Israeli state has presented itself as synonymous with Jewish religion, society and culture. Consequently any criticism of what it does is automatically defined as antisemitic. Just because nearly all members

of the IDF are of the Jewish faith does not make it a Jewish entity. Most US troops probably identify with Christian religion and culture but the mass opposition to their actions across the world from Vietnam to Iraq never, ever defined it as Christian. When governments and the media endorsed calls to destroy ISIS nobody claimed that it was Islamophobic just because ISIS members are nearly always Islamic believers.

Indeed in Bob Vylan's statement following the furore they forcibly make this point:

"We are not for the death of Jews, Arabs, or any other race or group of people," the duo wrote in a post on Instagram on Tuesday. "We are for the dismantling of a violent military machine — a machine whose own soldiers were told to use 'unnecessary lethal force' against innocent civilians waiting for aid. A machine that has destroyed much of Gaza."

Vylan certainly has good grounds to sue the Mail and others who are accusing him of antisemitism.

What 'death to' slogans signify

If you are fighting a genocidal occupation where hundreds of your family, friends and neighbours are bombed and killed daily it is a fairly, human and logical reaction to call for the defeat and even death of those soldiers who are killing you. This was certainly how the official ideology worked against the Germany army during the Second World War. It was a war – to the death – against the German people not always defined as against the Nazis or fascists. Vylan, as a black person acutely aware of colonialism and its violent oppression, was expressing solidarity with the just resistance of the Palestinian people against their occupiers.

'Death to' as a chant has a political metaphorical sense too as in we want the defeat of this brutal army, an end to it. It can be combined with appeals to Israelis not to enlist. When Iranians chant "Death to America" they would respond generally that they do not hate ordinary Americans but their imperialist government and army.

Generally speaking, the establishment and governments have accepted that the artistic and cultural context for what is considered extreme statements is distinct from a street demonstration or a political meeting. John Betjeman in his post war poem called for Slough to be bombed because he thought it was destroying what he treasured as some sort of British ideal. Bob Dylan in his *Masters of War* song celebrates the death of the warmongers

*And I hope that you die
And your death will come soon
I'll follow your casket
By the pale afternoon
And I'll watch while you're lowered
Down to your deathbed
And I'll stand over your grave
'Til I'm sure that you're dead*

I don't remember anyone calling for Dylan to be prosecuted for hate speech.

Not a slogan for mass solidarity

A quite separate discussion needs to be had about whether the Palestine solidarity movement should adopt such a slogan. This sort of slogan is less clear and understandable for the vast majority of people. The political sense of justifiable resistance to occupation is much less accessible.

A successful strategy for Palestinian solidarity does not require us to convince people of the right of armed resistance or even the military defeat of the IDF. Much more important is the need for boycott, disinvestment and sanctions and changing our own government's policies.

During the Vietnam war there was a debate in the USA solidarity movement about whether the main slogan should be "Victory to the NLF" (National Liberation Army) or "Bring the Troops Home now". The second slogan was adopted and it was a correct decision.

Bobby Vylan has paid heavily for his action at Glastonbury. Trump has made sure his bands US tour will be blocked and their agent has dropped them like a brick. Hopefully they will be able to continue to work. Like Kneecap the attacks on them has only inspired more interest and support for his stand – and his band.

Tarring Palestine Action with the terrorist brush

In 2003, [Josh Richards](#) attempted to set fire to an aircraft at a base belonging to the US Air Force. The lawyer who defended him in court insisted that his action was legitimate, needed to stop a war of aggression against Iraq. He did not limit himself to saying that Richards was no terrorist; he went further – insisted that his client was not any kind of criminal. Keir Starmer was that lawyer.

Women peace protesters outside Greenham Common, locked onto the US base's gates, and climbed the missile silos. Even the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher never tried to call them terrorists. The whole history of the trade union movement from the Luddites to the strikers in Taff Vale involved elements of damage to property. You could argue that some actions of the Suffragettes like arson or smashing windows were worse than what Palestine Action has done. Laws already exist to punish non-violent damage to property. Sentences have become more repressive already with the Elbit 13 serving long sentences.

The truly ironic thing is that Yvette Cooper would have probably had to define earlier Labour Party members and trade unionists as terrorists if she was being consistent.

Palestine Action organises non-violent direct action primarily against military targets or the arms industries. Recently two of its activists got into Brize Norton RAF base and smeared red paint on fighter jets. The fact that they got in and out without being detected meant the reaction of people like Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, was extreme.

In the event, possibly more nervous than she might have been after the chaos over the Welfare Bill, Cooper combined the proscription of Palestine Action with that of Maniacs Murder Cult, a white supremacist, neo-Nazi organisation and the Russian Imperial Movement, a white supremacist, ethno-nationalist organisation. Only 26 voted against – not even all the Socialist Campaign Group of left Labour and formerly Labour MPs.

A fightback is underway

However there has been somewhat of a backlash. Palestine Action has obtained an interim order that delays the process and there will a court hearing imminently on this. In two separate letters to Home Secretary [Yvette Cooper](#), the Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol) lawyers' group and the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers said that proscribing the group would set a dangerous precedent. The Netpol lawyers' group letter, shared exclusively with the Guardian, was signed by 266 solicitors, barristers and legal academics, including 11 KCs and 11 law professors. It stated:

"To use the Terrorism Act to ban Palestine Action from direct action would be an abuse of this legislation and an interference with the right to protest. Misusing terrorism legislation in this way against a protest group sets a dangerous precedent, threatens our democratic freedoms, and would be a terrifying blow to our civil liberties."

Signatories of the Haldane Society letter, handed to Cooper before MPs vote on Wednesday, include Michael Mansfield KC and Imran Khan KC – who represented the family of Stephen Lawrence and victims of the Grenfell Tower fire – and the Labour peer John Hendy KC.

It has been signed by thousands of people including the politicians Caroline Lucas, Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell, the actors Adeel Akhtar and Juliet Stevenson, teachers and vicars.

The letter says: "It [a ban] would leave many ordinary members of the public vulnerable – for example, simply wearing a T-shirt saying 'I support Palestine Action' would be seen as violating the proscription and action would need to be taken.

United Nations representatives have also condemned the measure. Even former Labour Justice Secretary, Lord Falconer had said calling them terrorists would be a wrong move.

An attack on the solidarity movement and the left

Once deemed terrorist, the measure could be used to undermine the solidarity movement and radical left. Websites could be shut down, leaders prosecuted and heavy fines imposed. Clearly the government is concerned that the Palestine solidarity movement rather than weakening over time is instead remaining strong and becoming more embedded in British society. Voters have already shown they will vote Green, Independent or further left because of the Labour policy on Palestine. Kneecap's set at Glastonbury was banned by the BBC but the live stream heroically captured in the burning heat by one woman got over 1.5 million views. Labour are in the process of losing a generation of progressive minded people.

We can leave the last word to activist actress, [Juliet Stevenson](#):

The definition of terrorism as laid out in the Terrorism Act of 2000 is clear, and includes "[serious damage to property](#)". Does [spraying red paint on to metal](#) constitute serious damage? The condemnation of this spraying of red paint on to planes as expressed by the home secretary, Yvette Cooper, does not appear to be matched by any equivalent condemnation by her of red blood sprayed on to the tented walls of Gaza.

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Source [Anti*Capitalist Resistance](#).

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[1] For example [Standing Together](#).