

# Celtic football supporters defy clampdown to show solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza

Tony Robson  
26 October 2023

Celtic football supporters staged a show of mass solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza, defying sanctions by club authorities and threats of financial penalties by Europe's football governing body, UEFA.

The home tie in Glasgow, Scotland on Wednesday evening of the UEFA Champions League match between Celtic and Spanish side, Atletico Madrid saw Celtic Park transformed into what the BBC described as "a sea of Palestinian flags." Thousands of flags were flown in the 60,000-capacity stadium. One corner of the ground was turned into a giant flag by hundreds of fans making a mosaic, (known as a tifo) by holding up single colour red, white, black or green flags.

The Palestine flag has been waved by Celtic supporters during Scottish domestic league matches since the uprising in Gaza began on October 7, with large banners reading, "Free Palestine" and "Victory to the resistance."

On October 10, Celtic supporter's group, the Green Brigade issued a statement which began: "Following a recent Celtic PLC statement, we would like to reiterate our unshakeable belief that we, and other football supporters, have the right to express political views on the terraces, just as ordinary citizens do elsewhere in society. Football remains one of the few areas of public life where working-class people have genuine political agency, and we will not be dictated to by an elitist board that has repeatedly demonstrated contempt for the history and traditions of Celtic Football Club."

The Green Brigade issued a press release this week announcing they would be distributing thousands of Palestinian flags prior to kick-off of the match against Atletico Madrid. It drew attention to the club's decision last week to ban supporters associated with the group from attending away matches and referred to the pretexts cited as a thinly veiled cover to justify a political clampdown.

"Currently, hundreds of fans are suspended from away

matches due to an association with the Green Brigade; despite receiving no correspondence, no allegations, nor any detail regarding any investigatory process.

"The suspension was communicated to the Green Brigade on Friday afternoon ahead of the Hearts match on Sunday afternoon despite alleged concerns dating back four weeks....

"Despite disingenuous claims, we have absolutely no doubt that these sanctions are motivated by a desire to quash political expression within the Celtic support, specifically in relation to Palestine at this time. In spite of this, and any further obstruction, we once again encourage fans to courageously fly the flag for Palestine.

"For those unable to obtain a flag, the Green Brigade will distribute thousands of flags outside the stadium. While it would be easier to distribute flags inside, we are prohibited from bringing the flags into the stadium. We respect the right of all fans who wish not to participate in such an action, however equally we ask that the same respect and freedom is afforded to all fans who do."

The supporter's group was prevented from pre-match access to the stadium where they are normally allowed to set up tifos or displays, but these restrictions failed in their objective.

The courageous stand taken by the Green Brigade was vindicated in the stands around Celtic Park and particularly the North Curve section as fans responded to their appeal to defy the gagging of free speech.

This is not the first time Celtic supporters have been singled out by UEFA, which has levelled fines against the club for previous displays of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Previous financial penalties imposed by UEFA included one for waving the Palestine flag at a match against Icelandic team, KT Reykjavik in 2014 and in the 2016 Champions League qualifier against Israeli side, Hapoel Beer-Sheva.

The club was also fined £15,300 last year for fans

unfurling an anti-monarchist banner during a Champions League fixture.

Earlier this month at a Champions League home fixture against Italian side Lazio, a giant antifa circular banner was held aloft by Celtic supporters. This displayed the image of former Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini as he had been hung upside down by Partisans with the words, “Follow Your Leader”. *Football Italia* wrote of the animosity between the two football clubs, “Celtic fans are known to be mainly left-wing, the opposite of Lazio ultras who have often been involved in antisemitic and racist incidents in Serie A.”

Rome based Lazio have a long association with Mussolini and the current Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni is an open admirer of the fascist dictator.

The actions of Celtic supporters at the Lazio match were referred to the UEFA Control, Ethics and Disciplinary Body, with UEFA issuing a statement, “Disciplinary proceedings have been opened following this match for throwing of fireworks and illicit banners.”

This record of political censorship refutes the attempts to smear solidarity with the Palestinians with the brush of anti-Semitism. The crackdown against popular sentiment against the genocide unleashed by the Israeli state is led by authorities who view even an anti-fascist protest by football supporters as an inexcusable offense.

UEFA Champions League fixtures are streamed to millions around the world, so the acts of impromptu protest by football supporters in the stadiums threaten to undercut the wall-to-wall pro-Israeli, pro-imperialist propaganda of the mass media.

Celtic Football Club issued a press statement on October 25, the day of the match, to reinforce its ban on open displays of pro-Palestinian sentiment, stating that the players and coaching staff of Celtic and Atletico Madrid would wear black arm bands “as a show of respect and support for all those affected by the conflict.”

It stated, “We have witnessed death, violence and destruction in the Holy Land in recent weeks, with thousands of peoplemen, women and children—killed, injured and displaced.

“We are witnessing a tragedy of horrendous scale. As it continues, everyone at Celtic prays for all who have been affected. We also hope and pray for peace, and for humanitarian support to reach those who are in need and in fear.”

This phoney display of humanitarian “respect” for both sides is directed at silencing opposition to a genocidal military offensive that has already killed thousands of

civilians in Gaza as both the aerial bombardment and starving of its 2.3 million population of Gaza has intensified by the right-wing Netanyahu regime. This is why the pious directives of the club were defied by Celtic supporters.

The ban on the Green Brigade receiving tickets to away games also has wider implications for civil liberties, undermining both the freedom of movement and expression. Football supporters are restricted from following their club if they express political opinions which do not conform to the dictates of the government of the day. The Sunak government and its Labour Party allies led by Sir Keir Starmer are backing the collective punishment of Palestinians and arming the Israeli Defense Forces in complete violation of international law.

When it comes to protesting in opposition to this outrage, every pretext will be found to justify why workers and youth should be stripped of their democratic rights. The WWSWS has reported on the employer-state witch hunt against the London Underground driver for expressing solidarity with protestors gathering in London last Saturday at the 300,000 strong demonstration against the war and in defence of the Palestinians. Over 8,000 health professionals have issued an open letter to demand that that the Sunak government stops solidarising itself with the Israeli state by flying its flag on government buildings and ends its backing for war crimes.

The clampdown against the protests of this character reflects the fear by the British ruling class, shared by their counterparts around the world, that an intervention by the working class threatens their continued support for the Israeli genocide and broader war plans in the Middle East.



To contact the WWSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**