

Release the Filton 10! Oppose state repression of anti-genocide protestors in Britain

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Ten activists who targeted Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems in Bristol remain behind bars three months after they were arrested and detained under draconian anti-terror laws.

The Filton 10—most aged in their 20s—were arrested over a protest organised by Palestine Action (PA). Six of the activists were arrested on site after they drove a van into Elbit's Horizon research and manufacturing centre. They destroyed weapons including drones that are being used to commit mass murder and ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

Four were arrested subsequently during raids on their homes by counter-terrorism police, one of them at gunpoint.

All 10 were held incommunicado and interrogated without charge for seven days under anti-terrorism laws. They were later charged with non-terror related offences, including criminal damage, but were imprisoned on remand under harsh and repressive conditions due to their initial questioning by counter-terrorism police.

An online petition by the families of Filton 10 detainees, demanding the withdrawal of the counter-terrorism procedures against them and their release on bail, has gathered more than 25,000 signatures.

The petition, started three weeks ago, explains the detainees are being subjected to “greater restrictions upon their rights and freedoms than those faced by regular prisoners, on spurious counter-terrorism grounds. This has included being denied reading materials and the right to practice religion, intrusive medical testing, and restrictions on association with other prisoners and communication with the outside world.”

The families describe police state measures: “One of the ten has been designated an escape risk without due cause, so that they are subjected to additional ill-treatment, including being woken up every hour, all night, every night. This sleep deprivation is a clearly politically motivated form of psychological torture.”

Following a campaign by supporters of the Filton 10, Madeleine Norman, held at HMP Bronzefield, is reportedly no longer being designated an escape risk. But the pre-trial detention of all 10 remains, with a full hearing not scheduled to begin until November 2025.

Clare Rogers, whose daughter Zoe was arrested shortly before her 21st birthday, wrote an article about her daughter's detention, titled: “Is my daughter a ‘terrorist’ for trying to stop a genocide?” Clare only learned of her daughter's arrest when four police officers arrived on her doorstep with a search warrant on August 6. She was unable to speak with Zoe for two weeks.

Although the Filton 10 have not been charged with terrorism, Clare explains: “they are still effectively terror suspects. ‘Terrorism connection’ appears on the webpage about their case on the Crown Prosecution website. The investigation is being led by counter terrorism police. The word ‘terrorism’ has clung to the ten and stripped them of their rights at every step. It is probably why they were refused bail.”

Clare recalled that a month after her daughter's arrest under the Terrorism Act, “I answered the door to a team of 12 counter-terrorism police officers who spent hours searching my home, leaving me physically shaking.” The bracketing of their cases as terror related “could mean that if they are convicted of charges such as criminal damage, their sentences will be much longer.”

Starmer's Labour government: genocide and domestic repression

The arrest and detention of the Filton 10 and other PA activists is part of escalating state repression by the Labour government aimed at silencing opponents of the

genocide in Gaza. On Friday, Jewish Israeli historian Professor Haim Bresheeth was arrested under the Terrorism Act during a protest outside the official London residence of Israeli ambassador Tzipi Hotovely. Bresheeth, 78-years-old and the son of Holocaust survivors, was accused of “hate speech” for stating that Israel has failed to defeat the Palestinian resistance.

Documents obtained recently by Palestine Action under Freedom of Information (FOI) have exposed direct collusion between then Home Secretary Priti Patel, Elbit Systems, and police agencies in the targeting of its activists. A cover note prepared by a Private Secretary in the Home Office on March 2, 2022, stated that government “officials have been in contact with the police about PA [Palestine Action].”

In April 2023, Elbit Systems UK met with Policing Minister Chris Philp and a representative from the Attorney General’s office to discuss “threats to manufacturing at Elbit Systems from protest groups”.

A note prepared for that meeting complained, “Although there have been successful prosecutions of Palestine Action members, there have been multiple instances of charges being dropped and defendants acquitted by juries and magistrates.” Other documents obtained under FOI show Israeli Embassy officials intervening via Douglas Wilson, Director General of the Attorney General’s Office, over legal rights available to PA activists at trial, resulting in their acquittal by juries. As PA notes, the Israeli embassy’s intervention “coincided with the courts increasingly disallowing activists to argue that their actions were proportional to the crimes of the weapons factories they disrupted.”

PA concluded: “The first of Palestine Action’s activists to receive a conviction did so on the 29th of March, 2022—shortly after Patel and [Elbit UK CEO Martin] Fausset’s meeting—and it’s likely that political interference has shaped the outcomes of cases against us. Furthermore, the police have escalated their use--and subsequent abuse--of counter-terrorism powers to indefinitely keep activists in detention, though Palestine Action simply does not fit the definition of a terrorist organisation.”

Huda Ammori, co-founder of Palestine Action, told a CAGE International meeting on Sunday that political and foreign interference in the targeting and prosecution of the group’s activists was an abuse of process and that consequently “the charges have to be dropped.”

Lawfare against pro-Palestinian activists is being intensified, led by Sir Keir Starmer’s government, with

the mounting use of anti-terror laws to suspend fundamental democratic rights and criminalise dissent. As Director of Public Prosecutions (2008-2013), Starmer helped spearhead the US-led political vendetta against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, colluding with Swedish authorities to prevent the resolution of state-manufactured sexual assault allegations in that country aimed at preparing the ground for his onward extradition to the US.

More than one year since Israel launched “Operation Swords of Iron”, backed by US and British imperialism, with the aim of exterminating the Palestinians in Gaza and obliterating their culture, the only people behind bars are those who have protested Israel’s crimes against humanity.

While anti-genocide protestors are being persecuted in Britain under the Terrorism Act, Israel is escalating its campaign of state terror against the Palestinian people. The carpet bombing of Gaza has killed 43,400 Palestinians since October 7, including 16,700 children—equal to one child murdered every 30 minutes. Thousands more Palestinians are buried under rubble. Starmer’s support for these measures, declaring Israel’s “right to self-defence”, is bound up with the broader aims of imperialism, including a regional war targeting Iran, aimed ultimately against Russia and China.

Palestine Action’s “direct action” methods of individual protest serve to deflect young people from Marxism, the working class, and the struggle for socialism. Only the working class on a world scale has the power to defeat imperialism. But notwithstanding our fundamental disagreements with the perspective and class orientation of PA, the Socialist Equality Party denounces the state attacks on its activists and members and calls for the widest political mobilisation by workers and young people to secure their freedom.



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