

Funding the Future

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As The Guardian notes this morning:

The home secretary is coming under increasing pressure to abandon plans to ban Palestine Action, as UN experts and hundreds of lawyers warned that proscribing the group would conflate protest and terrorism.

In two separate letters to 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.

As they add:

Additionally, several UN special rapporteurs, including those for protecting human rights while countering terrorism and for promoting freedom of expression, said they had contacted the UK government to say that "acts of protest that damage property, but are not intended to kill or injure people, should not be treated as terrorism".

The concerns are wholly appropriate. Banning people from opposing the glaringly obvious genocide that Israel is pursuing, aided and abetted by the UK government, which continues to supply arms and military support to that far-right, neo-fascist regime, makes no sense at all.

We have reached the absurd position where supporting the deliberate slaughter of innocent people and children carries no penalty, but opposing it carries with it the risk of 14 years in prison, being charged with a hate crime, and being subject to mass hysteria in the media because someone has had the temerity to stand up and express their concern about the actions of a military force that is clearly out of control.

Let me be clear that I do not, and never will, condone violence. That is hardly surprising when I am a Quaker. Nothing I say here should be conflated with doing so.

Nor is anything that I say here in any way antisemitic. Criticising the Israeli government cannot be, should not be, and never can be antisemitic. In fact, to claim that saying anything against it might be antisemitic when the Israeli government is not necessarily a Jewish identity, and it is not the fact that it is dominated by Jewish interests that is the

reason why I am criticising it, is just wrong. I am simply criticising it for the unjustified killing of other human beings in pursuit of its deeply misplaced political goals.

All that I am saying is that freedom of conscience, freedom of expression, and the freedom to undertake political opposition all matter. They cannot represent terrorism, and whilst the actions of those expressing themselves in ways that cause damage to property can give rise, quite appropriately, to criminal charges for that reason, to pretend that the charge is in question should be terrorism related is quite obviously absurd, and will only encourage juries to not convict people who might suffer penalties completely disproportionate to any offence that they might have to undertaken.

When politicians, like Yvette Cooper, propose the introduction of legislation that is obviously inappropriate, as the terrorist sanctioning of Palestinian Action clearly is, it is apparent that it is they, and not those who are speaking out, who have lost the plot.

It is absolutely essential that we retain the right to speak out against coordinated state terror, whichever state in the world undertakes it. It would be an act of deliberate oppression of basic human rights to deny us that freedom. Is that what the UK government really intends?