



Thursday 30th January 2025 - For Immediate Release

For further info: Howard 07459055152; Tim 07795316164; Paddy 07958275270

Photos and video available here: <https://tinyurl.com/Mass-Appeal-Images>

ONE THOUSAND PEOPLE TRANSFORM STRAND INTO POLITICAL PRISONERS EXHIBITION OUTSIDE ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE



Well over a thousand people have occupied the Strand, immediately outside the Royal Courts of Justice, blocking it to traffic in both directions.

The protesters have transformed the road into an exhibition of political prisoners, from throughout history. This is in solidarity with the political prisoners, known as the 'Lord' Walney 16, whose appeal hearing is being heard inside the court.

The action is being carried out by the Free Political Prisoners campaign, a broad coalition of groups including Defend Our Juries, Just Stop Oil, Palestine Action and Extinction Rebellion, among many others.

The campaign is calling for the overturning of the custodial sentences of the 'Lord' Walney 16, and the immediate release of all 39 Just Stop Oil and Palestine Action political prisoners currently being held in UK prisons. Of these, 28 are being held on remand, despite having been convicted of no crime.

The campaign is also calling for an end to the corruption of the legal system by oil and arms industry lobbyists. These include the disgraced 'Lord' Walney, a paid stooge of multiple oil and arms companies, masquerading as an 'independent' adviser to the Government.

Last year, Walney came under heavy criticism, from inside and outside of Parliament, for the blatant corruption and hypocrisy of his position. This led the Government to announce that his position was under review, with a decision promised by the end of October. With this still not having yet been reached however, he remains in post.

The action outside the court has been carefully designed to be a lawful expression of democratic rights. As a reasonable and proportionate response to the mounting repression of peaceful protest, taking place for a time limited period of 90 minutes, it falls well within the limits established by the Supreme Court judgement in Ziegler and others.[1] People have recently been arrested for far less however, so all those participating are prepared for that possibility.

Protesters are holding up images of political prisoners, past and present. The images include people who are currently imprisoned in the UK for taking direct action to protect life, over climate breakdown and Gaza. They also include famous figures from throughout history, such as Mohandas Gandhi, Emmeline Pankhurst, Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis and Julian Assange.

The exhibition is the third, and by far the largest action of its kind, as part of the growing *Free Political Prisoners* campaign. Similar actions have previously taken place outside Southwark Crown Court [2] and the Attorney General's office [3] in September and October of last year, with over 300 people taking part each time.

Inside the court, the two-day Mass Appeal hearing of the 'Lord' Walney 16 comes to a close today, with a decision expected shortly thereafter. The 16 were jailed for a combined 41 years for resisting the fossil fuel industry. This came shortly after the report of the disgraced 'Lord' Walney, which called for peaceful protesters to be treated as serious organised criminals. The UN has described these sentences as 'not acceptable in a democracy' [4].

Protests over the course of the two days have seen speeches and performances from celebrities including Chris Packham, Billy Bragg, Juliet Stevenson, Hugh Fearnley-Wittingstall, Robin Ince and Gavin Turk, alongside politicians including Caroline Lucas, Carla Denyer, Norman Baker and Baroness Jenny Jones. All have firmly opposed the Draconian repression of peaceful protest currently being witnessed in this country. [Footage of all speeches is available here.](#)

Hugh Fearnley-Wittingstall comments:

"It's increasingly clear that these unprecedented sentences are linked to the report by Lord Walney, a paid lobbyist for big oil and gas, and the worlds' most polluting industries.

Walney's infamous report portrays peaceful climate activists as organised criminals and demands their incarceration. And now UK judges seem all too willing to do his bidding – and in so doing they admit the direct interference of the world's most powerful, and most life-threatening industries, in our system of justice.

Astonishingly, the fact that the defendants were clearly acting on their conscience, which historically has always been a mitigating factor for sentencing, is now being used as an aggravating factor for harsher sentencing.

The Government needs to decide. Are you for peace, justice, and the planet? Or are you ready to bought and paid for by the world's most powerful and lethal industries? And at their insistence, to oppress and deny our democratic rights, to clamp down on peaceful protest, to silence the voices that only want to protect us all, and the planet we live on?

If Keir Starmer, Shabana Mahmood, and the new Government let these vicious laws, and these horrific sentences, stand as they are, if they let peaceful protestors and their families suffer this terrible injustice, then they fatally undermine their credibility as lawmakers; as harbingers of a just transition to a greener, cleaner safer planet; and as decent human beings.”

Lex Korte, spokesperson for the Free Political Prisoners campaign comments:

“The justification for these sentences is that they act as a ‘deterrent’. Lady Justice Carr, who leads the appeal court, only needs to look outside her window right now to see that the deterrent isn’t working. More than 1,000 people are risking arrest and possible prison sentences to protest the silencing of truth-tellers and corruption in courts.

“Deterrence won’t work. Because the existential threat from climate breakdown is far greater than the threat of prison. We will never give up on everything and everyone we love.

“Democracy has been sold off to the highest bidder. The wealth and power of oil, arms and tech companies has ripped through our institutions and corrupted the rule of law. It’s time for all who care about democracy and the rule of law to take action now.”

ENDS

For further info: Howard 07459055152; Tim 07795316164; Paddy 07958275270
Photos and video available here: <https://tinyurl.com/Mass-Appeal-Images>

Notes for editors

- [1] “Supreme Court upholds right to disruptive protest on highway”:
<https://gardencourtchambers.co.uk/supreme-court-upholds-right-to-disruptive-protest-on-highway/>
- [2] “Movements Demand: ‘Free Political Prisoners’ as More Peaceful People Jailed”
<https://defendourjuries.org/press-releases/movements-demand-free-political-prisoners-as-more-peaceful-people-jailed/>
- [3] “Hundreds Block Road Outside Ministry of Justice”
<https://defendourjuries.org/hundreds-block-road-outside-ministry-of-justice/>
- [4] “ ‘Not acceptable in a democracy’: UN expert condemns lengthy Just Stop Oil sentences”
<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/19/not-acceptable-un-expert-condemns-sentences-given-to-just-stop-oil-activists>