

A quarter of a million march in London to oppose Gaza genocide and mark Palestinian Nakba

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London again saw a massive solidarity march in opposition to Israel's genocide of the Palestinians in Gaza.

Saturday's march marked the 76th anniversary of the Nakba, the brutal ethnic cleansing of three quarters of a million Palestinians from the newly founded state of Israel. A leaflet issued by the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), "Ending second Nakba means mobilising workers against the Tories and Labour!" explained:

"The mass expulsion was achieved through systematic terror involving at least 31 massacres. Those Palestinians driven out, along with their descendants, were banned from returning to Israel and their homes and property seized.

"Today a second Nakba is being carried out by Israel, with yet more destructive weapons of mass murder and terror—aimed at the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, to be followed by the West Bank. And the horrors have vastly multiplied, with 800,000 trapped in Rafah and half a million forced to flee back to the ruined land they so recently left behind. The toll of more than 35,000 killed and 80,000 wounded grows by the day."

Leading the demonstration were Palestinians holding keys as a symbol of intent to return to their stolen land. The protest included a large contingent of students involved in some of the 25 campus occupations taking place nationally. There was a confrontation at Piccadilly Circus with a group of Zionists, waving Israeli flags and seeking to block the route of the march, with demonstrators chanting "Shame" including Jews marching in defence of the Palestinians.

The SEP's leaflet advanced a programme on which the anti-genocide protests can achieve their aims. It explained that in the US, Britain and other imperialist powers:

"Every major party, in government or opposition, backs Israel's genocide to the hilt, arms the Israel Defense Forces, slanders demonstrators demanding a ceasefire as antisemites, brutally represses campus and street protests and, as in the UK, prepares legislation criminalising them.

"After seven months of this horror, it is time for the Gaza protest to strike out on a new course. It is not enough to keep demanding a ceasefire, as if anyone in ruling circles is listening. The imperialist powers view the Gaza genocide as one front in a global war for the redivision of the world and its resources, encompassing the proxy war by NATO against Russia in Ukraine, plans for a Middle East regional war against Iran and ramping up tensions with China.

"What is required is a systematic political turn to mobilise the entire working class against these war criminals."

The leaflet stated that millions of workers and young who have taken to the streets to oppose the Gaza genocide know "There is no real difference between the Tories and Labour on anything that matters" and "hate Starmer and his MPs for backing mass murder citing Israel's 'right to self-defence' and refusal to even call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire.

"But this groundswell of opposition is being confined to various ineffectual protests—above all threatening to support any pro-ceasefire candidates in the general election in the hope that Starmer will be forced to change course by some Labour MPs wanting to save their own skins. Nothing will change on this basis.

"A turn must be made to factories and workplaces to mobilise the working class to mount blockades and organise industrial action to make it impossible for the government to supply weapons and other assistance to Israel. This will not happen without rank-and-file workers organising to politically challenge the trade union leaders, including the left-talking 'friends of Palestine', who have done nothing to mobilise their members since October.

Above all, the leaflet concluded with an appeal for workers and young people to build their own party, the SEP, which will stand candidates in the upcoming general election "dedicated to the development of a mass independent political movement of workers and young people against the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine and the plans for war against Iran and China."

The SEP spoke to several demonstrators at the party's stall at the end of the demonstration.

Arun had taken part in demonstrations in the UK and India. He stressed that the imperialist powers, "led by the US only want domination and hegemony in the Middle East... Israel is like a bulwark for the imperialist powers to secure their interests. I don't believe any imperialist nation will stop that.

"In India we have struggles because of the Narendra Modi government and Hindu fascism, we see similarities. The Indian ruling class is supporting the Israeli ruling class, arms exports are going up... There are many regional theatres of war, Ukraine, Palestine, Iran and possibly Taiwan and a danger of World War III.

"What was achieved by the protests against the Iraq war in 2003,

when millions demonstrated around the world? The humanitarian issue raises the political questions. If there is a political consciousness and leadership, we can mobilise working class action to shut down the shipping of arms to Israel. If the students make a militant struggle, if the democratic movement converges with the conscious political movement of the working class there is a huge potentiality.”

Ethan from the United States said, “On my university campus in Colorado there have been really big protests, and it has gotten shockingly violent from the police. The people in power—Netanyahu, Biden, Sunak—because of the military and industrial complex, war has become a thing that has to happen whether it is Ukraine or Gaza or anywhere and because of that they will let bad actors like Netanyahu do unspeakable actions. Instead of listening to what people are calling for they are just calling in the police to brutally suppress anything like a democratic movement.

“The working class is not aligned with them. They are fully aware of this and there is an attempt to scare the working class into not organising. For the most part the Democrats and Republicans are for the police crackdown... Biden will say, ‘Yeah, we are stopping an arms shipment to Israel’ but a couple of weeks later, ‘Yeah, we are going to give you another billion dollars.’ The system is not for us and that is why things need to change.”

Rania, a student, said, “I think the UK has committed atrocious crimes, the same with the US. Despite so many people clearly being against what the Israeli government have been doing for the last, six, seven months, nothing has actually changed.

“I don’t want the money we students pay in fees going towards funding this genocide. The student protests around the world are amazing.

“We’ve been told from a young age, that the West is supposedly the only democracy in the world. We know that’s not true. But we’ve been taught to fight for free speech our whole lives. And I think it’s just us using what we’ve been taught.

“It’s frustrating that nothing’s happening. We have the power to do something about it and to, to try to make a change.”

From the platform, there was no perspective advanced for waging a political offensive against the pro-imperialist parties of genocide and war. It included several Palestinian and Muslim speakers, as well as a representative of the Jewish Bloc, Emilie Stevenson of the British anti-Zionist group Na’amod.

Ahmed Alnaouq, a journalist and organiser of the Palestinian We Are Not Numbers NGO, said, “It is time to quit the Labour and Conservative who are complicit in the war crimes against the people in Gaza.” Leanne Mohamad, the independent candidate for Ilford North standing against Zionist Shadow Health Secretary Wes Streeting, condemned Labour for echoing “every position of your US imperial overlords.”

But Andrew Murray, the Stalinist leader of the Stop the War Coalition, did not call for the building of a political alternative to the Labour Party because this would have made it impossible for featured speakers Jeremy Corbyn and his former shadow chancellor, John McDonnell.

The same silence was maintained by Eddie Dempsey, a leading Stalinist within the Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT),

also tasked with concealing the refusal of any trade union to organise against Britain’s collusion in genocide.

Delivering a “personal message” of solidarity from “My General Secretary Mick Lynch,” he described students “occupying the campuses here in London and across the world” as “an inspiration.” But he proposed nothing for RMT members to do before his rhetorical finish, “Keep marching, keep fighting, demand your trade unions join in[!]. And together, we will hold these [unnamed] politicians to account.”

Fran Heathcote, Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union general secretary, wanted to “spell out how important Palestinian solidarity is for the union that I lead,” but could only cite a £10,000 donation to Medical Aid for Palestine. The PCS had an annual income of almost £26 million last year and a surplus of over £2.1 million. Heathcote this year took a 10 percent salary increase on her forerunner’s £103,000 salary, more than the £10,000 donated for medical aid.

Corbyn again said nothing about the Labour Party, or Starmer. His only mention of the political situation in the UK was the one line, “We will not give up, demanding the British government stops supplying arms.”

McDonnell made an important announcement that “On Monday, [WikiLeaks founder] Julian Assange will be in court for the most crucial hearing in his life. If he loses this, he’ll be extradited to US and faces a 175-year sentence. Come and join us on Monday morning at 8:30 at the High Court in the Strand to support Julian Assange for the work that he’s done.”

But he never mentioned Labour’s support for Assange’s persecution, let alone the key role played by Starmer as the Director of Public Prosecutions (2008-13) when the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) was dealing with an extradition request for Assange from Sweden based on trumped up sex allegations, from where he would be sent to the US. Starmer made trips to Washington in 2009, 2011, 2012 and 2013. In 2013, the CPS advised Sweden against agreeing to interview Assange in London, insisting, “Don’t you dare get cold feet.” Neither did McDonnell mention that he and Corbyn both kept their mouths shut about Assange’s case for almost five years from 2015—in order not to come into conflict with the Labour right-wing—when Corbyn was Labour leader and McDonnell shadow chancellor.

The rest of McDonnell’s speech was a self-serving account of his “campaigning” to allow Gazan children to come to the UK for medical treatment, with no explanation offered for his refusal to campaign against Labour’s support for Israel.



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