

300,000 demonstrate in London against Israel's war on Gaza

Our reporters

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The largest anti-war demonstration in Britain since 2003, when over a million protested the illegal invasion of Iraq, saw 300,000 people march and rally in London Saturday against Israel's war on Gaza.

The march assembled at Park Lane and proceeded through central London, ending with a rally in Whitehall, where the prime minister's residence, 10 Downing Street is located.

The march was so big that in the middle of the rally it was announced from the stage that the left and right part of the demonstration in Whitehall would have to go into nearby Parliament Square to prevent a possible crush, as so many were still arriving from Trafalgar Square.

The turnout was despite London being deluged by Storm Babet during the afternoon and restrictions on transport in the capital. At some points demonstrators were walking through several inches of rain on the streets. The march would have been even larger had not trains and other transport from the north of England been halted due to flooding and landslides.

The police ludicrously still tried to claim it was smaller than last week's 150,000-strong demonstration, saying that around 100,000 attended. This vast playing down of its size was faithfully repeated by the media, including the *Guardian*.

Young people, students and workers carried the Palestinian flag and chanted, "From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free", in defiance of the Conservative government's attempts to criminalise these actions. Noticeable was the number of homemade banners, with slogans such as "Stop killing children", "Free, free Palestine" and "End the Occupation". A large number of Jewish protesters took part.

Massive numbers of police were again mobilised, including counter-terrorism officers and specialised public order units among the 1,000 on the streets.

A London Underground train driver led a chant of "Free, Free Palestine" on his speaker system, adding, "Hope you all have a blessed day today and look after yourselves.". A video of the event on X/Twitter was viewed millions of times. London Underground Limited immediately

announced that they had asked British Transport Police to investigate the "incident".

At the rally, Kate Hudson of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament raised in her speech the call made by the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions for unions around the world to mobilise their members, as, "This urgent, genocidal situation can only be prevented by a mass increase of global solidarity with the people of Palestine and that can restrain the Israeli war machine."

Hudson said to large cheers, "Let us heed their call... and to the labour and trade movement in Britain, let us not be found wanting in our solidarity."

In reality, the leaders of the main railway unions in Britain, the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT) and the ASLEF drivers unions, speaking from the platform, avoided any mention of the call by the Palestinian unions, instead offered worthless pledges of "solidarity". ASLEF general Secretary Mick Whelan was announced to the rally as the leader of a union "which is a proudly affiliated to the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign."

Rather than mobilise the RMT's tens of thousands of members to prevent Israel from getting its hands on UK military equipment, the union is actually involved in ensuring its members man Royal Navy ships as part of the Sunak's government military build-up in the Middle East. Hence Assistant General Secretary Eddie Dempsey made no call to his own members or the working class to intervene independently to disarm Israel, but instead demanded, "End the blockage, end the occupation. We demand peace... We must bring pressure to bear on the politicians."

Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer has declared his support for Israel's cutting off food, water and electricity to Gaza, provoking mass opposition. Starmer's belated "clarification" Friday that he didn't really mean that Israel had a "right" to withdraw water and electricity only a "right to defend itself" fooled no one. His name was loudly jeered when it was mentioned on the platform.

But those attending found no avenue for struggle against Starmer in the tepid comments of Labour "lefts" Jeremy

Corbyn and John McDonnell.

Former Labour leader Corbyn, now sitting as an independent MP after being kicked out of the parliamentary party by Starmer, was introduced as the “People’s Prime Minister”. Yet as he did at last week’s demonstration, Corbyn refused to even mention Starmer’s name when speaking about our “political leaders” who “need to think on and think deeply”.

Socialist Equality Party members and supporters distributed thousands of copies of the WSWS editorial board statement, “Global outrage erupts over Israeli bombing of Gaza hospital”, and sold dozens of copies of the new *World Socialist Web Site* pamphlet, *Stop Israeli Genocide!* The pamphlet can be purchased here.

Hashim, originally from Sudan, spoke at the Socialist Equality Party’s stall. “What you’re seeing in Gaza is a neo-liberal colonisation of the Middle East. It has its own economic and historical background. They are pushing their agenda by getting rid of any resistance in Palestine, to establish their new order.

“Look at all the war zones within this area and you will understand how fake this ‘international community’ are. They don’t care about humanity.

“Sudan is still under colonisation, despite independence since 1956. When you look at the position of the United States towards Sudan, they don’t care about the Sudanese. They only care about their own interests.

Hashim cited Saudia Arabia’s war in Yemen, backed by Britain and the US, “They want to take over the world and they don’t care about the people. We Have to fight back, otherwise the whole world will see some sort of catastrophe. Gaza is a warning to the world.”

Laura said, “Like many people I feel sick to the stomach that the leader of the opposition is complicit in genocide, refusing to call it out as a genocide, or even the simplest thing of calling for a ceasefire.

“I’ve voted Labour in the past but I’m not going to in the next election because I can’t in good conscience. Then there’s also what’s come out from the leadership about no councillors or senior Labour Party members can be seen at protests. They aren’t allowed to show support for people who are being ethnically cleansed.

“It’s basic human rights. You’re meant to be a political leader and you can’t stand for people’s freedom, freedom not to be bombed!

“I’m not surprised by attempts to demonise protestors. That’s why it’s important so many people turn out because it counters the narrative. Try and argue with 500,000 people on the streets.”

Saskia said, “It’s another example of a marginalised group who are being completely ignored, and Britain is

complicit in it through its history with the British Mandate for Palestine, after the Ottoman Empire fell.

“It feels like a responsibility to act and speak up. Palestinians are living in an open-air prison; they’re being cut off from the internet, electricity, food, water. They are being blockaded by the Israeli government.

“This current Labour leadership, I don’t stand with them or support them in any way. Starmer, and all of them, can’t take back the words they’ve said. They claim to speak for the people, but they don’t. They’re the same as the Tories.”

Scarlet, a retail worker, said, “I was scared of being branded a terrorist sympathiser, but something needs to be done about what is happening. This is genocide. There are millions of people in Gaza, half of which are children. Our media and our government stand with Israel, Palestinian’s are fighting for their existence and we need to stand with them.

“Workers are the majority in this world. They have the real power. The unity of people of conscience in Israel and Palestine is the only way things are going to change.”

Steve, a care worker, said, “The media is telling a one-sided narrative, most of it is lies. What we are seeing on the internet, social media, I can’t sleep looking at it. Killing children non-stop, the cutting of food, water, electricity. I do not know where to start with the hospital bombing, it was sickening. Most of us grow up idolising America, but it’s not what you think it is. The government of Biden is very dark.”

Fawziyah, a student, brought a homemade banner to the demonstration stating, “End The Occupation.” She said, “I am standing with everyone who been victim to colonialism and everyone who has lost their homes and their family and their lives and their lineages, their culture. It’s not something new. It’s something global, but the British have a legacy... So I’m standing as a British person against British politicians.

“For example, the Labour Party’s lineup typically with Israel. I think we need to separate anti-Zionism from anti-Semitism. There are many Jews against the apartheid set-up in Palestine and they have been very outspoken in support of the Palestinians. But the British media and the main political parties hide behind claims of anti-Semitism, which is a lie to justify mass killing.”



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