

Defend London Underground driver victimised for expressing solidarity with Gaza!

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The victimisation of a London Underground driver for leading a chant of “Free, Free Palestine” has led to an outpouring of opposition. An online petition through the platform *Organise* has gathered over 70,000 signatures against threatened disciplinary action and to uphold the right to free speech.

The unnamed driver used his PA system Saturday to engage with passengers onboard a Central Line train travelling to the demonstration in the capital where 300,000 turned out to oppose Israel’s genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza.

A short video posted on Twitter/X went viral with millions viewing the clip. The driver is heard on the PA starting his message to “all those who are facing dehumanisation and the oppression of the ongoing occupation... I feel part of it although I can’t be there.”

He then repeated, “Free, free” with passengers chanting back “Palestine” and “No justice,” eliciting the reply “No peace.” He followed this with a short message, “Hope you all have a blessed day today and look after yourselves and keep all those people in your prayers.”

For the authorities this exchange, a snapshot of genuine public opinion, rather than the pro-Israel propaganda of the media and the government, was an unpardonable offence.

Transport for London (TfL) confirmed Monday that the driver had been identified and suspended. Glynn Barton, TfL’s chief operating officer, said, ‘A driver has now been identified and suspended whilst we continue to fully investigate the incident in line with our policies and procedures.’

The driver could face dismissal, but the reprisals do not stop there. TfL immediately referred what it called

an “incident” to the British Transport Police (BTP). Assistant Chief Constable Sean O’Callaghan confirmed, “BTP are working with Transport for London and investigating the matter,” as indicated by a X/Twitter posting at 4.29pm Saturday. The posting was viewed 1.4 million times with 1,295 replies mostly opposing police involvement. One asked, “Is saying “Free Palestine” a crime now? So much for freedom of speech.”

This witch-hunt takes place as Conservative Home Secretary Suella Braverman has demanded a police crackdown to criminalise mass protests throughout the UK against the Sunak government’s backing of the Israeli onslaught on Gaza.

Hundreds of thousands of workers and youth have defied Braverman’s threats to make waving the Palestine flag illegal and tantamount to supporting terrorism, and her branding as anti-Semitic the chant “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

The hysteria over the train drivers’ comments places him at the centre of this police-state clampdown. The ruling class fears that the courageous act of a single worker can ignite broader opposition within the working class.

The *Guardian* has not raised any objection to the frontal assault on democratic rights, but instead faithfully echoed lying claims that the defence of the Palestinians incites anti-Semitism. Its article on October 23 noted without comment, “The security minister, Tom Tugendhat, wrote on X: “London’s tube’s are for everyone. Many will find this intimidating. @MayorofLondon has a duty to help all Londoners feel safe”.

It reported that the Israeli embassy, no less, wrote, “It

is deeply troubling to see such intolerance on London's tubes... public transport should be a place of safety and inclusivity for all" and Conservative minister for London, Paul Scully demanding Tube staff "focus on the day job."

The reality is that the protests in London and throughout the world have involved major contingents of Jewish people and, in France, the US and Germany, Jews are among those arrested by governments backing war crimes.

The defence of the victimised London Underground driver requires the independent mobilisation of rank-and-file rail and transport workers and the entire working class.

In contrast to the *Organise* petition, there has been no public appeal issued by either the train drivers' union ASLEF or the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union to oppose the victimisation and mobilise against the dangerous precedent set by the combined employer-state witch-hunt.

Instead, the *Guardian* quotes Finn Brennan, a full-time organiser on London Underground for ASLEF, stating meekly, "The involvement of the police in this matter is a ridiculous overreaction to something that should clearly be dealt with internally by Transport for London in line with normal procedures."

"Normal procedures" means the inevitable victimisation of the driver, who may possibly lose his job, even if a criminal prosecution doesn't take place.

Even when the union bureaucrats feel obliged to mount a platform as they did on Saturday in London and speak on Gaza, this is to spike anti-government opposition. Both ASLEF General Secretary Mick Whelan and RMT Senior Assistant General Secretary Eddie Dempsey passed over in silence the open letter by Palestinians trade unions for their counterparts around the world to paralyse the Israeli war machine.

No word passed their lips to denounce Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer's writ threatening members with expulsion if they so much as join a protest. Dempsey stated instead, "We must bring pressure to bear on the politicians."

The only pressure being brought to bear is against workers and youth, to proscribe any practical action against the British government and its direct support for the Israeli state. The RMT has allowed its members in the Royal Auxiliary Fleet to be dispatched to the

Middle East as part of the Royal Navy build up alongside US warships to enforce the blockade of Gaza and threaten war against Lebanon, Syria and Iran.

The defence of Palestinians and opposition to a devastating conflict in the Middle East requires an independent political intervention by the working class. Workers must reject any attempt by the employers to punish workers for taking a stand against war crimes and genocide against defenceless civilians by the Israeli war machine and its imperialist backers.

They have no right whatsoever to dictate how workers think and express themselves politically, especially when they are opposing such an appalling crime. All disciplinary action should be dropped, whatever code of conduct is cited by TfL. This is a case of class injustice which needs to be overturned through collective struggle.

The world's media is saturated with pro-Israeli propaganda. Every major party, Labour above all, has lined up behind Netanyahu and the Israel Defense Forces. Major public buildings either fly the Israeli flag or are lit up in blue and white. It is the organisers of this propaganda barrage, Sunak and Starmer at the head of the list, who should face criminal prosecution and the loss of their jobs, not workers bravely opposing them.



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