

500,000 march in London against Gaza war

Our reporters
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Saturday’s “March for Palestine” in London, UK was the largest since the beginning of Israel’s onslaught on Gaza. Following marches of 150,000 and 300,000 in the last two weeks, an estimated 500,000 participated in a massive repudiation of the war.

Assembling at Victoria Embankment, the march crossed two of the capital’s bridges before proceeding past the seat of government in Whitehall and ending in Parliament Square.

Thousands of Metropolitan Police officers imposed Section 12 and 14 Public Order Act restrictions, dictating that all protesters keep to a defined route and preventing anyone from gathering outside the Israeli Embassy in Kensington Palace Gardens.

Even by the putrid standards of Britain’s media, which dutifully echoes the pro-Israel war propaganda put out by Downing Street, the reporting—or, more accurately, non-reporting—of Saturday’s event was appalling.

What coverage there was would have made Joseph Goebbels proud. As the event which shut down central London was taking place it was largely ignored by the media. Any articles or updates referred to “thousands” (BBC) or “tens of thousands” (*Independent*) being involved.

This ludicrous attempt to conceal the numbers involved saw universal acceptance of the estimated size of the protest given by the Metropolitan Police—only a week after they claimed a march of 300,000 was 100,000 strong. Reuters went one step further, reporting at 10.00pm that “Police estimated the turnout at between 50,000 and 70,000 people.”

With the majority of the Labour Party at one with Rishi Sunak’s Conservative government in backing Israel’s “right and duty to defend itself”, and the trade unions refusing to mobilise their membership against the war—the organisers of the march, including the Stop the War Coalition and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign—centred their effort on a rescue operation for the bureaucracy.

A mass movement against war was told repeatedly that the most important task was to pressurise the government and, more important still, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer to urge Israel to agree a ceasefire.

Speaking on behalf of Stop the War Coalition, Alex Kenny, a national executive committee member of the National Education Union, began the speeches by declaring, “Every demonstration we’ve held in the last few weeks is making a difference, because its shifting the dial on public opinion, and its putting pressure on our politicians.

“[Labour Party London Mayor] Sadiq Khan is the latest politician calling for a ceasefire. It won’t be long before Keir

Starmer is calling for a ceasefire if we keep turning out in our numbers like this.”

Speakers declared that the way forward was to enlist more support for the Early Day Motion put forward by Labour MP Richard Burgon calling for a “cessation of hostilities,” hailed for being signed by 95 MPs from “eight different political parties”.

Five members of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labourites were on the platform: Jeremy Corbyn, Diane Abbott, Richard Burgon, Apsana Begum, and Bell Ribeiro-Addy. None of them, including Corbyn and Abbott who have had the party whip removed, even mentioned Starmer by name when they denounced those who support Israel’s war crimes.

Burgon said of his motion signed by less than 15 percent of Parliament’s MPs and under a quarter of Labour MPs that “it falls to every one of us to get our government to do the right thing.”

It was left to two nominally “left” trade union leaders—Mick Lynch of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union and Matt Wrack of the Fire Brigades Union—to call on Starmer, a self-declared Zionist, to demand a ceasefire.

“Starmer must call now for an immediate ceasefire, and mass emergency aid for the people of Gaza,” said Lynch. “The Labour Party and our whole movement must show it’s on the side of the peacemakers, not the warmongers.”

The march was called under the slogan “Ceasefire Now!”, but to assert that this can be achieved by persuading Sunak and Starmer to make a polite appeal to Netanyahu and his government of war criminals, let alone their paymaster the Biden administration in Washington, is politically criminal.

The Socialist Equality Party participated in the march and handed out thousands of leaflets advertising our upcoming meeting in London against the war, on November 9, “Stop Israel’s Genocidal War on Gaza!”

The SEP’s call for the meeting states, “Standing fully behind the war criminals in Jerusalem, Washington and London is the Labour Party, whose leader Sir Keir Starmer is an accomplice to mass murder, despised by workers and youth.” It concludes, “The only force that can defend the Palestinians and put an end to the global eruption of imperialist violence is the international working class.”

Many in attendance stopped by the SEP’s stall in Parliament Square to find out about the meeting and to purchase the pamphlet “Stop Israeli Genocide!”

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to a number of those participating in the demonstration.

Fahmawi, a British-Palestinian from London, held a homemade placard calling for action against companies funding the Israeli genocide.

“In terms of the severity of the situation, it is nearly as dangerous as the Nakba in 1948. We are reaching a tipping point... We can all do our part in terms of boycotting, divesting and sanctioning, whether as an organisation or as a worker, saying no to being complicit in Israel’s genocide. I have seen on the internet working people are calling for a general strike next Friday. People in the UK wanting to strike, not go to work, not fund any companies.”

Elisabeth, who works in welfare services in Oxford, said, “I have been on protests in defence of the Palestinians going back eight years, when I was at university. I know this is a struggle which goes back seventy-five years, but even in our lifetime things have not changed. It has become progressively worse.

“I don’t know how you can call what Israel is doing in Gaza anything other than genocide. When you claim to be going after a specific group but are indiscriminately bombing civilians across the region. When you think of the size of the Gaza strip, and 50 percent are children.

“Nothing that Sunak says is in my name. They are backing collective punishment and use of white phosphorus. They should be tried as war criminals. Workers who have the power should strike industries to stop arming Israel.”

Kareemah, a student in London, held a placard condemning Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, who backed Israel’s collective punishment of the Palestinians.

“Everyone deserves their human rights. It did not surprise me what he [Starmer] said; they do not care about the atrocities. It is good people around the world are getting together against this; I’ve seen the protests in America.”

Kaz, an IT worker from Milton Keynes, said, “It’s despicable what is happening. It is nothing short of genocide. This was a land given to a third party. Of all the people of the world, the Jews have probably suffered the most in recent history. They know above anybody else that they should not be oppressing other people.

“The governments in the UK, the US, and anyone else, should be held to account, they are all criminals. They all have blood on their hands.

“This feels like another proxy war from the US, like in Ukraine. Of course, I am not happy for any sovereign country to be invaded but it looks like, in that situation, Russia’s hand was forced.”

Rizwana attended with her daughter. She said, “What people are seeing on the news and what people are seeing in reality and on social media is a completely different story. We didn’t really know about the whole situation with Palestine for 75 years; I read it all up, it’s just horrific what they’ve gone through.

“It’s genocide. Why are they killing all the babies? All those people who were evicted from their homeland and never allowed to come back! It’s heartbreaking to see these images coming out of there.

“These people are helpless without a voice. We have to be a voice for these people. Everything is restricted for them. They can’t do the everyday things. To be living like this in the twenty-first century is just appalling. These people are suffering, these children and these innocent people are suffering.

“You can’t just sit there and watch it. It’s the first time I’ve been to any protest and I thought to myself, ‘We have to make that

difference. We have to get heard for them’.”

“Thinking about what’s going on, the Ukraine, I’m thinking what else are we being lied to about, by the government and media? We need to look into what’s going on in these places.

“Keir Starmer is absolutely appalling. To sit there and say, ‘just get on with it’, murder all these children. I’ve voted for Labour since I’ve been 18, but I won’t vote Labour again.”

Heema, a special needs teacher, attended with her family. She explained, “I’m here because we want a ceasefire, to stop the bombing. They’re targeting civilians, hospitals, churches, schools, where civilians are taking shelter. Our priority is a ceasefire and after that there needs to be a lasting peace. This can’t happen again. Half the people in Gaza have PTSD.

“This started in 1948, when the first Nakba happened. The fact that people use October 7 to start the narrative, they obviously don’t know the history of the conflict. The next generation see things differently, everyone is finding out about the ins and outs and the background of conflicts.”

Yusuf, a worker in London originally from Algeria, said, “The media are not showing this, they’re not showing the truth. The protesting here, broadcasting on social media showing the real truth to society, is the only way to get it across—the mainstream media won’t show it.”

The assault on Gaza is “disgusting, it’s terrorism, it’s genocide. A ceasefire needs to happen right now. The Israeli army’s intention is the same as it has been the last 75 years: to wipe out Gaza, to take the land.”

The British government’s response has been “disgusting, partnering with Israel, standing with Israel—both Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer.”

Yusuf supported strike action against the Israeli war machine, along with “boycotts against anything that’s funding military weapons, in any way, being sent to Israel.

“Look around you, this is a peaceful protest. And they’re scared of the movement: 300,000 last week, more this week, it’s soon going to be over a million people in London. So, any way they can they’re going to try and twist it—like they’ve been doing for years.”



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