

London demonstration demands immediate Gaza ceasefire, not “operational pause”

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Hundreds of thousands of people marched in London on Saturday, demanding an end to Israel’s onslaught on Gaza.

The march was the first in the UK capital since the hostage deal between Israel and Hamas was brokered and the beginning on Friday of a four day pause in the aerial bombardment by the Israel Defences Forces (IDF).

Protesters in London and internationally turned out in numbers, rejecting efforts by western governments to claim that that Israel’s bombing pause signified a move towards an eventual ceasefire and peace. Many on the London protest brought homemade placards condemning the war crimes carried out by the Netanyahu government, with the full backing of the United States, Britain, and other imperialist powers, including the bombing of refugee camps, hospitals and schools. One banner on the demo was a replica of Pablo Picasso’s searing painting *Guernica*, comparing Israel’s war crimes with the destruction wrought by German forces in April 1937 during the Spanish Civil War.

The march was met with mass state intimidation, with the Metropolitan Police, backed up by forces from around the country under “Mutual Aid” arrangements from as far away as Northumberland, Durham and Wales.

Police officers handed out intimidatory leaflets along the route of the march from Park Lane to Whitehall and deployed “spotters” looking out for what is deemed criminal activity. The leaflet warned “To avoid ending up in our cells, DON’T use words or images that are racist or incite hatred against any faith”, that “support Hamas or any other banned organisation” and stated, “If in any doubt bin any placard or sign that might break these rule.” It warned against using “threatening

words or aggressive behaviours that could be considered intimidating.”

Sky News reported that police officers would “also be briefed on chants which may cross the line into criminality, with lawyers and Arabic speakers on hand.”

The police made 18 arrests, including four members of the Maoist Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist–Leninist) manning a stall on Whitehall. Police confiscated literature. A police statement on the incident read, “Images were shared on social media showing literature being distributed which featured a swastika inside a Star of David” that was “likely to stir up racial hatred.”

The homes of the four CPGB (M-L) members were raided by police at 3am on Sunday morning, while they were still being held in cells.

Two weeks ago, a female protester was detained after a police and media witch-hunt for carrying a placard with the same image featuring a swastika intertwined with the Star of David.

The organisers of the march, including the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and Palestine Solidarity Campaign have been insisting for weeks that the only way to stop Israel’s onslaught is to pressure bourgeois politicians, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and opposition Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer to reverse their support for Tel Aviv. This same line continued Saturday.

Noticeable by their absence on this week’s protest was any prominent representative of the Labour “left” grouped in the Socialist Campaign Group (SCG), or any recognisable nominal left trade union leader. In previous weeks, including at the 800,000 strong march two week’s ago, speeches were given from the platform by former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who

now sits as an independent having been booted out of the parliamentary party by Starmer and has spoken at every national rally since the genocide started, his former shadow chancellor John McDonnell, and SCG secretary Richard Burgon.

But one of only two Labour MPs who spoke in London Saturday, Labour MP Bell Ribeiro-Addy, said, “A four-day pause is good. The release of Israeli hostage and Palestinian prisoners is good, but it’s not enough... Western governments should stop pretending there is nothing they can do. They should be moving every diplomatic channel for a ceasefire.”

She concluded, “So we have to keep up the pressure internationally. We have to keep marching, keep lobbying, keep sitting in, because that is what brought about the pause—people power—demanding an end to the bloodshed, and that starts with a true and meaningful and permanent ceasefire, because in the end the only option is peace.”

Neither Ribeiro-Addy nor her colleague Apsana Begum addressed their membership of a party which supports the genocide, with three quarters of its MPs opposing a ceasefire in a vote only 10 days ago. Yet again, as with every Labour MP, and Corbyn, party leader Sir Keir Starmer, was the great unmentionable, as the “left” determined not to conflict with the pro-genocide Labour leadership.

Speaking on behalf of the Stop the War Coalition was John Rees, a leader of the pseudo-left Counterfire group, upheld the amnesty for the Labour and trade union bureaucracy. The words “Labour”, “Starmer” or “trade union” never passed his lips.

Rees declared, “We will have a ceasefire, we will not go back to the mass slaughter of Palestinians by the IDF. If this pause does not turn into a full ceasefire, we will have a demonstration the size of which the capital of this country has never seen.”

Nothing, he said, in full rhetorical flight, would stop protesters from demonstrating and chanting the slogans they choose “and aiming to bring down any government, this government, the next government that does not commit itself to freedom for Palestine.”

The STWC are not in the necessary and essential business of mobilising the working class to bring down the governments supporting Israel’s genocide in Gaza and will do nothing to damage their cosy relations with the Labour and trade union “lefts”. Their explicit aim is

only to change policy in ruling circles so that British imperialism is not so closely tied to US imperialism and pursues a more peaceful orientation.

Last week, Rees spoke at a demonstration outside Starmer’s constituency office. He stated that after the demonstration of 800,000, ‘last Wednesday they [MPs] were queuing up to speak on our platform outside the House of Commons. And we have now got the Liberal Democrats to come out for a ceasefire, we have split the Tory government, we’ve caused the biggest rebellion in the Labour Party since the rebellion against Blair over Iraq, we’ve got the Welsh Parliament to come out for a ceasefire, we’ve got the leader of the Scottish Parliament to come out for a ceasefire... My message to Keir Starmer is this, get with the programme. Demand a ceasefire now.’”



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