

UK pupils and students protest during day of action against Israel's onslaught on Gaza

Our reporters

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School, college and university students walked out of classes across Britain on Thursday, in opposition to Israel's onslaught in Gaza.

London

In the capital, around 500 school and university students protested in Whitehall, across the road from Downing Street. Pupils from schools around the capital attended along with their parents. They were joined by students and workers from a number of institutions including the University of the Arts and King's College London. Dozens of students also protested at Goldsmiths University in south London, before travelling to join the Whitehall protest.

Jethro, a university student at University of the Arts, London, spoke to Socialist Equality Party/International Youth and Students for Social Equality members at Downing Street.

Danny came to the demonstration with his son, who attends a school near Wembley.

"I've come down today because there are children, my son's age, and older, who have been killed in Gaza. We can't let that happen. Our government needs to do something about this because they're complicit.

"I'm watching Al Jazeera everyday and it's unbearable. These are all our children, these are your children, these are my children. It's the most horrible thing to see, to see parents looking for their children. They can't find their children, or they've been blown to bits.

"We just need to stop this. You can't kill the idea to be free, that want and need to be free. If they end Hamas, the people will still want to be free.

"I have taken my child out of school today and we will be there at the national demonstration on Saturday. Every right that we have in this country has been won, otherwise we'd have kids still going up chimney and cleaning them."

Danny opposed Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer's support for the genocide, saying, "Starmer said it's not the right place to criticise Israel for war crimes yet when it was

Russia, he said Putin was committing war crimes!"

Opposing claims that to oppose Israeli genocide was antisemitism, Danny said, "A lot of Jews are anti-Zionists, so are they antisemitic? Do they hate themselves? No. I saw a video of Jews who are opposing this getting beat up by Israeli police. My final message is Free Palestine!"

Ayelen came to the protest with her daughter. "At her school, it is very clear they are treating the conflict in a vacuum, that it's just about October 7. There's no conversations with the children about the reasons of the conflict, the reasons for October 7. It is the typical answer, and also the same as my [Labour Party] MP Helen Hayes has given, and it's from the western establishment and it's a form of indoctrination.

"The school are taking a position of silence on this demonstration. I called them about it and they didn't answer."

Ayelen's parents lived under dictatorships in Argentina and the 30-year, US-backed military regime in Brazil. This background, she said, had helped her daughter to understand the situation in Gaza. "She is engaged on human rights and on the structures of colonialism and the Palestinian cause. Also, coming from colonies, I think it is much easier for us to observe certain structures of expropriation, dispossession that the British establishment and US imperialism has played in our communities in the global south.

"Israel has bombed refugee camps and schools and hospitals. It is using an artificial intelligence system to hit with more precision. And we only hear the death toll of civilians. So, I wonder if indirectly they are confirming their position is to kill civilians. And that was founded with the Zionist state of Israel's foundation. They all followed the position of ethnic cleansing.

"The crimes of our governments are happening there in real time. The west has normalised war and I hope this will be an awakening for an anti-war movement and spirit."

Abdullah, aged 19, said, "I came here today because we want to end the bloodshed, suffering, the pain and the extreme ethnic cleansing of the people in Palestine. I'd like to say to all the parliaments around the world, we need to stop the pain".

Over a hundred students with their families and supporters gathered in Manchester's St Peter's Square. Students from the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU), Loreto College, Hulme Hall School and INTO college, among others, attended the rally.

SEP/YSSE members spoke with **Mo** and **Emma**.

Sonny, a journalism student from MMU, said, "I had lectures today but chose to come down here to see the strike and how passionate people are about Gaza. I have tried to educate myself through coming along to the protests and I am completely on the side of the Palestinians. There have been atrocities on both sides, but Israel is an occupying power, oppressing the Palestinians and it goes back a long way and this needs to end."

Mohammed, also from MMU, said, "This has been going on for 75 years, the oppression of the Palestinians, but that has not been highlighted in the media.

"You really need to go on social media like Twitter/X to find out what is really happening now from people inside Gaza. The bombing and killing of women and children, the destruction of hospitals, schools and universities. It is a massive crime and if it is not stopped it will end up a modern-day version of the Holocaust. We have a 'free media' but this is not being portrayed, it is being hidden from the public.

"Netanyahu is the main war criminal but all those supporting him are as well: Starmer, Rishi Sunak and Joe Biden. All of them are contributing to the killing of civilians. They know what they are doing, they are signing things off and they are holding meetings about what is going off."

Social worker **Rua** condemned the support of the UK government for the slaughter in Gaza, saying, "We can't rely on our current government, we need to rely on the younger generation. Lots of people are opening their eyes to how the government works. It's all about power and oil.

"I didn't understand much about the Iraq war; I knew a lot of people were going to die, but I understand a lot more now—the lies and fabrications they make to justify war in the name of money, and in the name of power.

"A lot of the words coming out of the Knesset [Israel's parliament] and the Israeli government are Islamophobic. It's terrifying, they're extremely right-wing.

"There are a lot of Jews who have been called antisemitic because they don't support the slaughter in Gaza. If you are pro-Palestinian you are called a terrorist.

"I put pro-Palestine on the side of humanity because we all want the hostages returned safely home, we all want peace, we want no more bloodshed, that's what the pro-Palestine side is. If you say you are pro-Israel and you are not acknowledging what is going on in Palestine, that is hatred and brainwashing and indoctrination has gone on there."

Jo attended **Mother** rally with two friends who had walked out of school with a school friend. She had come to the rally "to support these guys [her children and their friend], it's their first demonstration, to make sure they're ok. It's the right to strike. We should all have the right to speak out.

"What's happening in Gaza is sad, it's tragic, it should affect us all. We should all be out. The unions aren't bothered. Our response [to the Palestinian unions' appeal to stop weapons shipments to Israel] should be full support, but it's just not happening.

"It should involve the government calling for a ceasefire, not providing Israel with any monetary funding, but the government here or in America won't do it—not a chance. I don't know what the next step is, I don't know how we enforce it."

Asked about the propaganda campaign citing mass rape to distract from the intensifying bombardment of Gaza, Jo continued, "I don't know what the evidence is, and obviously, previous evidence has been found to be lies. I would never want to doubt someone who said they had been a victim of rape, but also there have been victims of rape in detention centres in Israel. On the other hand, nothing justifies the massacre in Gaza."

Bradford

Bradford College student **Idjaz** said he joined the walk-out call because events in Gaza "are horrendous and it all needs to stop, and someday they will come to an end. The vote of the MPs [overwhelmingly opposed to a ceasefire] showed they don't care, they don't stand for the people, the stand for themselves".

College student **Ally** explained, "I think what's going on around the world is disgusting and shocking. We should have a ceasefire right now because all these innocent kids and parents are dying and not having a future".

"This government is supporting genocide and promoting this because it's greedy for money. Rishi Sunak is the greediest person in parliament and deserves to be kicked out. We are doing a bit in this country by protesting. We can only do so much. We are trying to get a strike date in college as well and workers that support Palestine should take a day off work and demand a ceasefire".



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