

Thousands protest throughout UK against Israel's destruction of Gaza

Our reporters

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Protests attended by thousands of people continued to be held in towns and cities across the UK on Saturday in the absence of a national demonstration in London against Israel's destruction of Gaza.

At the December 9 demonstration in London, the Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign announced that the next national protest would not take place for over a month, on January 13.

Eleven local protests were held in London, including a rally of health workers who assembled at Westminster Bridge in front of St Thomas's Hospital before rallying in Whitehall outside the prime minister's residence in 10 Downing Street. Professor Dr. Ghassan Abu Sittah told the rally, "Israel snipers are surrounding Indonesia hospital in Jabalia camp and continue to fire into the hospital, trying to kill as many of the staff as they can. As we speak now, Israeli tanks surround Al-Ahli Baptist hospital and Israeli air forces have been bombing the area surround the hospital. As we speak now Israeli forces have tried to shut down, the Al-Sahabi hospital, the only working maternity unit in northern Gaza.

Several thousand people protested in Birmingham, with other protests held in Leeds, Sheffield, Bristol, Oxford, Norwich, Bedford, Derby, Cardiff and Glasgow.

Several hundred people gathered in Camden, north London, before marching to Swiss Cottage and protesting outside the residence of Israel's fascist ambassador to the UK, Tzipi Hotovely. The WSWs spoke with Diana, an academic, and Nina, who works in hospitality, both from Australia.

Diana said, "The paralysis of our governments, refusing to act against Israel, makes everyone feel like they have to move, they have to act, they have to do something. Just coming together on the street and showing solidarity, in the face of such grief, makes us feel like we can act and have an influence."

Describing the horrific situation in Gaza she said it was, "Devastation, genocide, to the extent that we're unable to imagine and it's hard to see how it could ever recover. And

then you have the invisibilising of Palestinian pain by the centring of Israeli grief, as if there's an equivalence at the moment. And the silencing that happens through that process. We watch these unbelievable distressing images and see the stories, the deliberate targeting of healthcare workers, of artists, and of children."

Nina said, "It's not about religion, it's about land, at the end of the day. It's just not antisemitic to protest these things; it's not against Jewish people."

Diana added, of the slandering of protesters as antisemitic, "It's a strategic move of the Israeli state to silence any criticism of the state to make any opposition seem maliciously motivated. So many Jewish brothers and sisters are telling us being anti-Zionist is not antisemitic."

Edith told reporters, "I'm here because I'm standing for the kids of Palestine who face oppression and abuse and have their human rights taken away, no food, no water no electricity, and on top of that they're being bombed. As a mother to a young baby, I have personally suffered a mental breakdown watching what has happened to these kids who are injured and orphaned, some of them dying on the floors of fucked up hospitals, where there are no resources.

"As a mum, your worst fear is not dying, it's leaving your kids behind on their own without anyone to love them and protect them. I feel in my heart these women's grief and fear and pain.

"I am also here in solidarity with the heroes who spend hours digging people out of the rubble, in sandals, in awful circumstances.

"The theft of land, the all-round apartheid and annihilation of the Palestinian people, which is something that's been happening for decades. It's evil, that's what I know."

Referring to the Labour Party, she said, "It's awful. All of them have let us down. I was always Labour, but I think Keir Starmer is a poor leader for the Labour Party, probably the worst person we could possibly have. It's left us thinking, who can we vote for?"

"America and the UK have a lot of blood on their hands. Its torturous for us trying to scream and shout for justice

when no one's listening. And I don't know how there is going to be a way out of this."

When WSWs reporters raised the strategy of industrial action to stop the shipment of arms and political strikes to bring down conflict governments, Edith replied, "That's a great idea. I've seen there are things like don't send your kids to school, don't go to work. I'm not in a position to do so, but saying that, I would if it came down to it I would. Like the lockdown we had during the pandemic, I don't see why we can't do it again for a good cause like this."

Marcus said, "I'm supporting Palestine against Israel. That's my position. I am against Israel, not simply pro-Palestine. Some people don't want to make these distinctions. I think they are scared to be considered antisemites. What I am is completely, one hundred percent anti-Zionist. There is a difference between being Jewish and being Zionist.

"Especially the BBC and the media try to confuse this, particularly in the last 10 years—I don't remember these claims being so widespread before that. There's been a change."

Marcus said of the Labour Party that its position was criminal: "And hopefully they are all going to be prosecuted. My sign says, 'Supporting Israel makes you complicit'. So politicians and organisations like the BBC are complicit. Just yesterday they read out the names of the three hostages killed by the Israeli army; they never read the names of all the Palestinians killed, not even the children, they are forgotten. All the focus is on the Israeli victims and their families, how they need support. They are still alive; 20,000 Palestinians are not."

Around 500 people attended a march and rally in Leeds which started at main university and ended in City Square.

Helen said, "I can't stand by and watch people being massacred in our name, it was wrong in the 1930s, it was wrong in the 40s and I can't stand by and watch people being killed. Our government not only does nothing but supports and condones it but not in our name.

"The world's governments are allowing it while people who are standing up against it are being vilified. Its basic humanity, you can't stand by and watch people being killed, whoever they are, it's just wrong.

"It is genocide, every single aid organisation in the world, Amnesty International, Save the Children have all stated its genocide, war crimes are being committed. We spoke out when war crimes were being committed against people in the Ukraine and we should stand up now against the war crimes being committed in Gaza.

"I think there are political reasons as to why the British government isn't calling for a ceasefire, isn't calling for an end to the bombing, there are definite political reasons for

that. People who are committing genocide and war crimes and it has been documented that they should be tried as war criminals."

Asked about government shipping military aid to Israel, and the call by Palestinian trade unions for unions internationally to call out their members to stop it, Helen responded, "It's a war crime to be sending arms to a country that is committing war crimes, that should not be happening. End of."

Bedford

The WSWs spoke to Rihanna about why she was attending the protest in Bedford.

Armina said, "I will not vote for Labour next time. It's really disgusting that Keir Starmer can call himself a socialist because he's not one. No socialist supports genocide.

"The genocide is about money and power. War fuels money in this economy. We're selling weapons to Israel. This country is profiting off genocide and war and that why the politicians are supporting it.

"For the first time we're seeing things, whereas in Iraq we were hearing about it. But now there's social media, a big social media presence so we're seeing a lot more about it. Without it we wouldn't be having these big protests because we wouldn't know what's going on there. This is really powerful because for once we were seeing everything and we're doing something about it.

"The situation is that the genocide needs to end. They are just using their power to kill human beings. I don't even see it as being a war anymore because it stopped being a war a long time ago and they are just killing innocent people. It started with the occupation of Palestine way back before October 7. It is over money and power. It is capitalism and the countries that have the money and power are backing the war. I think there is a lot of oil under Palestine and they want that."



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