

Thousands protest in London against Gaza genocide, as police step up repression

Our reporters
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Ahead of the next UK national rally in London on January 13 against Israel's genocidal destruction of Gaza, thousands protested in regional actions around Britain on Saturday in a "Day of Action for Palestine".

There were 11 protests in London, including one in Camden which marched to the constituency offices of Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer and Labour MP Tulip Siddiq, both supporters of Israeli genocide. The rally in Harrow included a march to the office of Starmer's Shadow Minister for International Trade of the United Kingdom, Gareth Thomas MP.

More than 50 protests were held nationwide, including in Birmingham, Brighton, Derby, Leicester, Lancaster, Manchester, Nottingham, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Glasgow, Dundee, and Cardiff. Thousands protested at the rally in Belfast. A rally outside the RTE broadcaster, called by Mothers against Genocide was held in Dublin, Ireland. 108 pairs of shoes were laid out in a display to signify the number of journalists killed by the Israel Defence Forces since the conflict began in October.

London's Metropolitan Police mobilised to clamp down on the protests. Protesters, led by the Free Palestine Coalition gathered in St James Park, planned to block nearby Westminster Bridge, adjacent to the Houses of Parliament. As the protests were assembling, police removed one of the group's sound systems. Scuffles broke out police attempted to break up the protest by moving several organisers away from the area. They arrested two women under the Royal Parks and Open Spaces Regulation 1997.

As protesters staged a sit-in near Westminster Bridge, hundreds of officers moved in to prevent the action from spreading. Police kettled the demonstration of more than 1,000 people, forming a wall on three sides, preventing them from moving for hours and stopping any more protesters accessing the bridge. Protesters chanted, "Who do you serve, how do you protect?"

Police did not give a figure on how many officers were deployed, but stated, "A large number of officers responded to a protest in central London this afternoon." At 2.15pm the

Met announced they had "imposed conditions under Section 14 of the Public Order Act 1986. This means the group is only allowed to protest in Bridge Street and it must end by 3pm."

WSWS reporters spoke to some of these protesting at the rally in Camden, London against Starmer's support for the genocide.

Zineb, a teacher, said, "Unless you give a voice to these issues, they end up being not forgotten but hidden. Especially with this issue there's so many ways it gets hidden or people's words get misconstrued; you get told you can't call for a ceasefire because that's a horrific thing to say, that you don't want children to die!"

Her partner, a Palestinian, added, "To be taken seriously needs action. I'm not sure that trusting the political class to act on our interests is reasonable anymore.

"A more important reason is for the people who are under occupation and oppression to understand that they are not alone. There are people in all corners of the world who see the injustice and are willing to speak up."

Zineb continued, "As a teacher, you teach in school about people like Rosa Parks, and I'd feel like such a hypocrite if I wasn't here. Because you're telling children, 'these are our rights, these are role models'.

"Sometimes I worry that history is made too comfortable for everyone. For example, Rosa Parks she wasn't a little old lady who sat on a bus, she was a revolutionary. So, I worry about things being taught in a way that makes revolutionaries more palatable but distorts what they really were.

"When our children grow up, I want them to know that when you want change to happen, it's not a case of just sitting around waiting for somebody else to do it. You have to actually speak up, actually go to the protests, actually boycott, actually let people know what Palestinians are saying. Otherwise, it is hypocritical to celebrate these people, when they would be rolling their eyes at us if they saw us sitting on our couches on a Saturday."

Answering the slanders that opposing Israel's genocide is

antisemitism, Zineb continued, “Every time you come to one of these protests there’s always a huge Jewish presence, and they say, ‘not in our name’. Basically what [those levelling accusations of antisemitism] are doing is silencing them too, which I find to be antisemitic. You’re saying that Zionists speak for all Jewish people, when they don’t.”

Speaking about the long history of imperialist-sponsored violence in the region, she explained of her partner, “His family is in Jordan, they were moved in the Nakba. Some ended up in Syria. The family that went to Syria, they have been displaced again because of the war. His family in Jordan, we want to take our son to see them and a conversation we’re actually having is ‘Let’s go sooner rather than later’, because look at what happened in Syria.”

Mary, a local resident, said, “It’s horrendous what’s happening in the Labour party; I’ve left because of it. The branch in this area was horrendous on Palestine, They wouldn’t accept that Israel is an apartheid state, even.

“Jewish people in the Labour Party supporting Palestine are being expelled as antisemitic. He [Starmer] doesn’t have my vote; I will not vote, there’s no one else I would vote for.”

Speaking about former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, she explained, “I never thought he would make a good leader; I didn’t support him as a leader, I support him as a person and for his politics.”

When WSWS reporters raised about his refusal to fight the right wing of the party over the antisemitism witch-hunt, Mary responded, “Looking back, it’s difficult to judge what was on his mind. But that’s what I mean about him not being a leader; he couldn’t take the brave decisions.”

Lynne said she was attending to protest “the inhumanity of what’s going on and the fact that western governments, who are always going on about their humanity, their democracy, their support of the right of people to struggle for freedom, are openly supporting genocide, the murder of over 10,000 children and possibly more under the rubble, the bombing of hospitals, the killing of children in incubators. I think it’s absolutely appalling.

“And we’re not even seeing it anymore on the BBC, they’ve scaled down their reporting because they’ve seen the outrage it’s causing in this country. I think that’s the most appalling thing. The fact that we have media that’s been shut down. We’ve been walking along the pavement—we should be walking along the road in a demonstration. I think that right has been curtailed.

“We have to all stand up and do something about it. We have to do something about it.

“I think they want to destroy any idea of Palestine, to eliminate Palestinians. It’s not about Hamas. In any case, they called Mandela a terrorist. So anyone who fights for

their rights and for their freedom becomes a terrorist in the eyes of their oppressor. So we’re not allowed to say the ‘H’ word on protests. Who has the right to defend Palestinians? Why don’t Palestinians have the right to have a defence against what’s happening to them? Why don’t they? I don’t understand. How do the oppressors have the right to determine how you struggle and who struggles?

“They [the Israeli government] won’t stop. They’re not going to stop. It is genocide. They want to eliminate the Palestinians, just as Hitler wanted to eliminate the Jews in the ‘Final Solution’. This is their ‘Final Solution’. Doesn’t it look like that?”

Speaking about the Labour Party, Lynne said, “I’ll never vote for the Labour Party again. I was a Labour Party member since the 70s but left [when Blair came in] and then re-joined when Corbyn came in, and have now left again. But we’ll never join again. I think the Labour Party has been so tarnished by what they’ve done in Iraq and now Palestine, so I don’t think there’s any future for the Labour Party as it now stands.

“And I’m shocked and horrified and disgusted that the Arab countries haven’t done more. It’s been left to the Yemenis to actually take some real action.

“I just hope the demonstration next week is a big one. I hope the movement continues to grow, as it did for South Africa and as it did for Vietnam.

“The unions haven’t been involved. Where is their involvement? It’s absolutely shocking. I think there should be strike action, there should be far more. And why aren’t they using their clout within the Labour Party? It’s like the tail is wagging the dog. They’re the ones who give the financial support and allow the Labour Party to organise. So why on earth aren’t they exercising some sort of control on this?”



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