

UK protesters demonstrate at weapons factories and demand “Stop Arming Genocide”

Stefan Steinberg
8 January 2024

For the past months, in the absence of any opposition by the trade unions, demonstrations and protests have been taking place across Britain aimed at preventing the exports of weaponry and weapon parts to Israel which are being used in its genocidal war against Palestinians in Gaza.

On January 3, a group of around 60 activists from the Cymru Peace Coalition held a protest at a BAE Systems production factory in Wales. BAE Systems is one of the main production sites for ammunition, especially 155 mm, which is being extensively used by Israel, and in Ukraine by its armed forces against Russia.

The protesters held up banners reading, “Stop Arming Genocide” and “UK Weapons Kill.” A spokesperson for the Peace Coalition stated that Britain was an active collaborator in the war crimes being committed against Palestinians, via its lucrative arms trade with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Prior to intervening in Wales, the same group carried out a similar protest at the Elbit Systems factory in Bristol. Elbit Systems is one of the three largest defence companies in Israel and plays a central role in the genocide against the Palestinians with weapons systems such as “Iron Sting”.

On January 6, protesters gathered in Bristol under the slogan “Stop Arming Israel”. One of the central demands of the demonstration was the dropping of all charges against the “Elbit Seven” who were arrested by police and charged with causing criminal damage at the Elbit UK Technical Headquarters in Bristol on “Nakba Day” (May 15) in 2022. On Monday, the trial of the seven, set to last for four weeks, began at Bristol Crown Court.

For the past month, activists from Bradford Friends of Palestine have also been holding protest rallies at the premises of the Teledyne Technologies factory arms plant in Shipley, West Yorkshire. Teledyne is a US-based multinational arms company which designs and produces surveillance and targeting equipment which it sells to Israel and many other countries.

WSWS carried out the following interview with one of the protesters, Drusilla Long. Drusilla is a retired social worker living in Leeds who has been very active in the campaign in the region to highlight the crimes being committed by the Israeli government.

WSWS: You are among a group of activists who have picketed the Teledyne factory in Shipley on a number of occasions. Can you explain why you are taking this action?

DL: I took action joining pickets on December 19, 2023, and January 4 this year, against the Teledyne arms plant in Shipley, along with other forms of protest, after the current genocidal attack on Gaza by the Israeli state began in October. The pickets were organised by Bradford Friends of Palestine. Israel depends heavily on UK and US arms sales, with £500 million coming from the UK. Without these weapons it could not be carrying out the current genocide.

WSWS: What is Teledyne and what is its connection to Israel?

DL: Teledyne is a US multinational arms company with a plant in Shipley, West Yorkshire, which designs and produces surveillance and targeting equipment, which it sells to Israel among other countries. This equipment is used by the Israeli state to kill civilians in Gaza currently in their thousands and has been used with deadly force against the Palestinian population in

the past.

WSWS: At the demonstration on December 19 speakers heavily criticised the Labour Party leadership which has rejected the call for a ceasefire in Gaza and also rejects all of the evidence that Israel is carrying out a genocide in Gaza. What is your response?

DL: No-one can vote for Labour. They refuse to accept the evidence before their eyes that a genocide is being committed by Israel in Gaza. Labour refuse to condemn Israel. The Labour Party is therefore complicit in this genocide. When asked do you support stopping water to besieged citizens in Gaza, [Labour leader Sir Keir] Starmer replied he did support people having no water—in other words he agreed that hundreds of thousands of people should die of thirst.

WSWS: It is notable that the call for an embargo on weapons to Israel has not been taken up by the trade unions in Britain.

DL: The union leadership is entirely absent from the current protests. Ordinary union members are out on the streets, writing to MPs, boycotting Israeli products, stopping arms factories functioning etc, etc, while the right-wing union leadership has nothing to say, when instead they should be calling for action in support of Palestine.

WSWS: Could you explain how you developed your understanding for the plight of the Palestinians?

DL: The UK has played a leading role in causing the disasters suffered by the Palestinians from the time of the founding of the state of Israel. The Nakba, the forceable expulsion of three quarters of a million Palestinian people by Israelis from their homes, took place in 1948, and all my life Palestinians have been struggling for their rights, the right to their land and to return to their homes, whilst Israel and settlers snatch more and more land away by force. The horrific incidents in history dawn on you gradually. I educated myself about these events, studied the history and joined the International Solidarity Movement.

I went to Palestine first for a short time in 2012 to take part under Palestinian leadership in actions in the West Bank. These actions included protesting against the Occupation Wall and being shot at by the Israeli army with “rubber” bullets—in fact rubber encased in steel which can kill you. They fired tear gas and emptied filthy water on us. Palestinians are fired at with live rounds and are being killed as we see today daily

on our screens. It was impossible to gain entry at that time to Gaza.

I returned in 2014 to take part in a joint social work conference with Palestinian social workers. The conference had to take place in two venues, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, because some Palestinians living in Bethlehem were forbidden by the Israelis to travel to Jerusalem.

WSWS: What is your view on the current aims of the Israeli government and IDF in Gaza?

DL: The actions of the Israeli government are genocidal: the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular national, ethnic, racial, or religious group—the Palestinians—with the aim of destroying that group. Israel has stated this intention, whilst calling Palestinians “animals”.

WSWS: How do you respond to accusations that any criticism of the actions of the Israeli government amounts to antisemitism?

DL: Any criticism of the actions of the Israeli state and the genocide being perpetrated by them is certainly not “antisemitic” since it would be against any Jewish or any semitic person’s welfare and wellbeing *not* to criticize genocide and fight against it; as in World War II.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact