

Half a million march in London against Israel's genocide in Gaza and US-UK war on Yemen

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At least 500,000 people demonstrated in London on Saturday's National March for Palestine—Ceasefire Now rally in an outpouring of opposition to Israel's genocidal attack on Gaza and Britain's involvement in the bombing of Yemen this week.

The march took place just days after South African lawyers put forward a devastating case proving that Israel is carrying out genocide against the Gazan population.

The London event was part of a global protest, with demonstrations held in over 120 cities in 45 countries, across the six inhabited continents.

In the United States on Saturday, a massive demonstration encompassing 100,000 people took place in Freedom Plaza in Washington. While not as large as the November 4 protest, which drew in over a quarter million, Saturday's demonstration, organized by several American Muslim groups, was nevertheless extremely significant. More than 100 days of slanders and propaganda from the media and both political parties did not prevent masses of people of all backgrounds, including many Jewish people, from marching in the cold.

Tens of thousands of protesters, including entire families with their children, chanted against "Genocide Joe" Biden and "Bloody Blinken," the US secretary of state. The WSWS will be publishing extensive interviews with protesters.

In New York City on Friday night, roughly 100 people marched in support of Yemen and against the illegal US/UK airstrikes. Despite the fairly small size of the march, roughly 100 police officers were dispatched to the march to police and harass the peaceful protestors, who chanted, "Hey hey, ho ho, Israeli boats have go to go," and "Gaza called, Yemen answered."

Saturday's march in London was the seventh national demonstration held in the UK since Israel unleashed its destruction of Gaza on October 8, with the backing of Downing Street and other imperialist governments. The protests have seen millions pour onto London's streets.

This was the first demonstration in the capital for over a month and the largest since the November 11 march, which attracted 800,000 people.

The march assembled in London's banking district before heading west down Queen Victoria Street and along Fleet Street to Parliament Square in Westminster.

The Metropolitan Police flooded London, with 1,700 officers including numbers bolstered by other forces from as far away as Lancashire. Restrictive conditions were put in place, including no one being allowed to deviate from the route specified; that no participant could enter a sealed off area around the Israeli embassy in Kensington, and that the speeches at the assembly after the procession ended by 4:30 pm and the whole event by 5 pm.

Ahead of the march, the Met's Deputy Assistant Commissioner Laurence Taylor said, in an attack on free speech, that protesters who "intentionally push the limit" on placards or chanting slogans faced arrest. This was after Conservative Home Secretary James Cleverly said, "I back them to use their powers to manage the protest and crack down on any criminality."

There were nine arrests, including three people under the Terrorism Act who were distributing leaflets. They were arrested on suspicion of showing support for a proscribed organisation. Three arrests were made for inciting racial hatred—one related to a placard and two for chanting. Among those arrested was a member of the Revolutionary Communist Group.

The marches in London give expression to the mass opposition to Israel's genocide, with the latest polls showing almost 80 percent support for a ceasefire in Gaza. But for the last three months, this opposition has been denied any viable perspective by the perspective of the main organisers of the UK protests, the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. The majority of MPs from the opposition Labour Party are fully behind the Sunak government in backing Israel's genocide, with Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer specifically endorsing war crimes by saying that Israel had a right to deny the Palestinian population water, food and medicine.

Therefore, the rallies in London have regularly featured the few Labour MPs opposed to Israel's onslaught. These include

Apsana Begum, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Richard Burgon and John McDonnell. Also speaking on platforms are two MPs expelled by Starmer from the Parliamentary Labour Party—former party leader Jeremy Corbyn (who led Labour from 2015-19) and Corbyn’s then shadow home secretary, Diane Abbott.

Corbyn spoke again this week, after having been invited by the South African delegation to the Hague to listen to their case against Israel’s war crimes. Speaking, after being introduced yet again as “the People’s Prime Minister,” Corbyn denounced Israel’s genocide and made his usual calls for world peace, but once again managed to omit any mention of Starmer or the Labour Party.

Such is Starmer’s role in facilitating genocide in the week he agreed with the bombing of Yemen that Stop the War Coalition Deputy President Andrew Murray—a Stalinist who served for two years as the special political advisor for Corbyn—said, “Sunak and Starmer are up to their waists in Palestinian blood”. But no conclusions were to be drawn from this and no political break from the Labour Party or struggle against it was proposed. Instead, Murray declared that there “could be peace in the Red Sea tomorrow if Israel stopped its attack on Gaza. That is the root of the problem.”

The answer was for “the Royal Navy to get out of the Red Sea and get back to Portsmouth” and “imperialism out of the Middle East.”

Murray stated this while speaking alongside Begum and Ribeiro-Addy, who represent a party that along with the Tories functions as a single party of imperialist war in Parliament.

Begum and Ribeiro-Addy were presented by one of the hosts of the rally declaring that “while most members of Parliament in that place should be hanging their heads in shame for their complicity in Israel’s killing and for their action in Yemen, there are a handful who do speak up for peace.”

Both MPs made correct points in opposition Israel’s genocide, while studiously not mentioning the role of their own party in this and avoiding any mention of Starmer’s name so as to avoid any clash with the Labour right.

To bulk up their credentials and convince demonstrators that there was a core of the Labour Party which remained anti-imperialist, a tiny number of Labour MPs prepared to go on record in opposing genocide participated for the first time on an anti-Gazan genocide protest as part of a self-proclaimed “Labour Bloc”. Among the groups involved are the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Momentum, Labour Women Leading, Labour and Palestine, Labour CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), Arise—a Festival of Left Ideas, and Welsh Labour Grassroots. Also backing it are the Labour Hub, Labour Outlook and Left Horizons organisations. Assembling at Saturday’s rally, they were addressed by McDonnell and Ribeiro-Addy.

One of the Labour Blocs’ representatives is Jess Barnard, a non-MP member of Labour’s National Executive Committee and the chair of UK Young Labour. Barnard has been alone in

routinely denouncing Starmer’s support for genocide from platforms. At the rally Barnard hailed the forming of the Labour Bloc, which she called the “Left Bloc”. Barnard said from the platform of Saturday’s rally that “the air strikes in Yemen and continued support for Israel has received the backing from my own party leader Keir Starmer, who has shown himself to be less human rights lawyer and more human rights liar... Starmer is on the brink of repeating the bloody history of Tony Blair, marching hand in hand with the US into another disastrous war in the Middle East.” In contrast, she added, “we, the people, and the members demand a ceasefire, and that is why we need to build a resistance to warmongering in the Labour movement.”

Barnard followed up by hailing how “this week for the first time the Left Bloc, a coalition of groups” had “joined us to march for Palestine, despite attempts to restrict us from attending these demonstrations. Labour members are joined together, join the Left Bloc... we will not become a mouthpiece for war, we are Labour Members for Palestine.”

Barnard’s isolated declarations only serve to highlight the deafening silence of her parliamentary allies.

In the recent WSWs article, “Corbyn, the Stop the War Coalition and the way forward in the fight against the genocide in Gaza”, Socialist Equality Party National Secretary Chris Marsden explained:

The STWC must laud the anti-war credentials of Corbyn and his dwindling band of supporters all the more urgently given that the Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress are so openly pro-war and their grip on workers has been massively eroded. Holding up “Corbynism” as an anti-war tendency is therefore essential if the STWC are to hold out the prospect of forcing Labour to make a turn on Gaza.

This year a general election will be held in the UK, with all polls showing that Labour holds a commanding lead over the widely hated Tories. The moment an election is called, the band of “left” Labourites mounting anti-war platforms will be on the stump campaigning for a Starmer-led government and performing whatever political gyrations are necessary to portray this as a huge step forward for the working class.



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