

250,000 demonstrate in London against Israel's onslaught on Gaza, as police step up repression

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Around 250,000 people demonstrated in London on Saturday's National March for Palestine—Ceasefire Now rally. This was the eighth national demonstration in the capital since Israel unleashed its genocidal onslaught on Gaza.

Held during a national rail strike, the numbers attending were down on the last national demonstration on January 13.

Police arrested a member of the International Marxist Tendency (IMT) and initially detained two others. Rahul, an NHS doctor, and his two comrades were apprehended on charges of “supporting terrorism”, with police citing a headline on their placards and newspaper, *The Communist*, calling for “intifada until victory”. The arrested IMT member was later released without charge after being held for several hours in a police station, following a protest mounted outside.

The Socialist Workers Party reported Sunday that police “pushed into the Socialist Worker Student Society (SWSS) section of the march, seized the lead banner with its slogan, ‘Victory to the resistance’—but then returned it.”

The Metropolitan Police also changed the time of the dispersal order for the march without prior notice from 5.30pm to 4.00pm, only making this change known in a tweet posted at 4.22pm. The announcement cited the move giving “us extra powers to prevent any antisocial behaviour should it occur.”

In the days leading up to the latest demonstration, the Met attempted to ban the march entering the seat of government in Whitehall—the thoroughfare leading from Trafalgar Square to Parliament that contains the prime minister's Downing Street residence. When the march organisers—including the Stop the War Coalition

and Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC)—told the Met they intended to finish the demonstration in two stages, with one rally in Trafalgar Square and one in Whitehall, the police said “under no circumstances” would the march “be allowed to march in Whitehall”. On Thursday the PSC tweeted its plan that the march would go “to Whitehall”. The Met responded on its social media, “The scale and frequency of marches is causing serious disruption to many Londoners. We do not support a request to extend the march into Whitehall.” The police backed down on Thursday evening.

At the outset of the Gaza massacre, Palestinian trade unions called on trade unions internationally to prevent the Israeli war machine from receiving weapons and other material for the war from the main imperialist powers. The call was met with a deafening silence from the main unions federations everywhere, including in Britain.

No major union has organised delegations of workers to attend the hundreds of demonstrations held around Britain since the genocide began. Trades Union Congress (TUC) leader Paul Nowak, overseeing affiliated unions with a membership of 5.5 million—has not spoken on a single march in London to condemn the genocide. This is in line with Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer's backing for the genocide, in alliance with the Sunak Conservative government.

The pseudo-left cheerleaders for the union bureaucracy have worked to cover their exposed rear by setting up a trade union block on the last few pro-Gazan marches to give the pretence that they are organising something. These consist of a few local union branches where pseudo-left supporters hold positions taking

banners and a few members to rallies. It commits no-one to doing anything.

Commenting on Saturday's demonstration, the *Socialist Worker* stated, "There were at least 31 trade union banners in the special section of the march, and many others sprinkled throughout the rest of the demonstration."

The purpose of this was to hail a workplace and student day of action taking place on Wednesday February 7, in which no industrial action is to take place.

Several speakers lauded the presence of the "trade union block" and called for support for next Wednesday's day of action. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union president, Stalinist Alex Gordon, was chosen as the speaker for the Stop the War Coalition and introduced as the president of the "mighty, mighty, RMT."

Gordon told the rally, "This week is going to be an important week for taking action for Palestine, standing with Gaza, showing solidarity with Palestinians in your workplace. This week, on the 6th of February, the RMT London regional council, along with the London organisations of Unite the Union, the UCU [University and College Union], and the NEU [National Education Union] are holding a mass rally in the NEU headquarters."

Speaking of the February 7 "workplace day of action," he added, "Stop the War and CND are calling on everyone who goes to work or attends a college or university" to organise "a walkout at lunchtime or an early morning protest with your fellow workers."

Gordon again urged demonstrators to limit themselves to pressuring the main capitalist parties by "demanding that our government stops fuelling war, stops colluding in the genocide of the Palestinians and instead calls and votes for a permanent ceasefire in Middle East."

Gordon heads a trade union with 80,000 members who play a key role in transportation and logistics nationwide, with the power to bring the economy to a standstill. Behind his belated and rhetorical pledges of solidarity with the Palestinian trade unions, RMT members aboard Royal Navy auxiliary ships are involved in supplying the British warships backing Israel in the region, including acting alongside the US in the ongoing bombing of Yemen.

Speaking again at the rally was Jeremy Corbyn, who led the Labour Party from 2015 to 2019, before being expelled from the parliamentary party by Starmer on false allegations of antisemitism. In line with Corbyn's years of refusing to oppose the right wing, he again refused to utter Starmer's name, only stating that "those countries, Britain and the USA and others, that are still supplying arms and weapons and military assistance to Israel need to think again. If they read very, very carefully what the ICJ [International Court of Justice] judgement says, they are also in danger of being arraigned before a court for standing up against the judgement of the ICJ, which says there has to be an end to the fighting."

Corbyn added, "Can I also say a special thank you to the trade union block that is here today and the trade unions and trade union members that have come here today, responding to the call of the Palestinian trade unions for action all around the world in support of the people of Palestine."

The Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign leaders have from the outset insisted that given enough pressure, the Tory government and the Labour Party can be won to opposing the slaughter. Numerous speakers put forward the slogan, "No Ceasefire, No Vote," calling on everyone to vote in a general election expected months from now against MPs not calling for an end to the genocide. This was summed up by Claudia Webbe, also expelled by Starmer from the parliamentary party, who stated, "We take our fight from our streets to parliament to the ballot box."

Backing Gordon, RMT General Secretary Mick Lynch made yet another pathetic call for Starmer to end his support for the Zionist regime, stating, "We call on all of the trade union movement, and all of the socialist movement, and our Labour Party, stand up and support the people who are being massacred, stand up against the slaughter, stand up against genocide... that's what we must do. Call out the politicians. Tell them stand with the people".



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