

The trade unions, the working class and the UK's day of action for Gaza

International Youth and Students for Social Equality (UK)
6 February 2024

The International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) stands in solidarity with the students and young people participating in walkouts, protests and vigils in Britain this Wednesday to oppose the genocide in Gaza.

Young people have dominated the protest movement which has seen millions take to the streets since Israel's barbaric assault began. And they are seeking to mount effective action which can bring a stop to the slaughter.

Over the last three-and-a-half months, every solution proposed by protest organisers such as the Stop the War Coalition and the Palestine Solidarity Campaign has failed.

Appeals to the Sunak Conservative government and the Labour opposition to back a ceasefire have been ignored. Threatening individual MPs with "No Ceasefire, No Vote" in a general election that will likely not be held for months is just as futile.

The United Nations and the International Court of Justice have done nothing to stop the genocide, their entreaties met with naked contempt by Israel and its backers in Washington and London.

Many understand that ending the war on the Palestinians means taking the struggle to the UK government and the arms corporations supplying the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). This is what the Palestinians have asked for. In October, the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions Gaza called for workers around the world to refuse to build or transport weapons destined for Israel and to act against companies in any way involved in the siege of Gaza.

For months, this appeal was totally ignored by Britain's trade union leaders, including those promoted by Stop the War on its platforms. Today's day of action is supposed to mark the beginning of a shift by

the unions into finally taking a stand. It is nothing of the sort.

Once again, Stop the War and the various pseudo-left groups within it, Counterfire, the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party and others, are covering up for the trade union bureaucracy's continuing refusal to mobilise their members against the genocide.

No industrial action of any form is taking place. Neither the Trades Union Congress (TUC) nor any of the three largest unions, Unison, Unite and the GMB, have even said a word about the "day of action". Those that have, limit themselves to appeals to individual members to attend early morning, lunchtime, or evening vigils outside working hours—nothing that will financially impact the corporations growing rich off the bloodshed in Gaza, or even mildly inconvenience the UK government.

After Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union leader Mick Lynch called at last weekend's Gaza demonstration for everyone to "stand up and support the people who are being massacred, stand up against the slaughter, stand up against genocide", the RMT has organised a bake sale at Kings Cross station and a lunchtime rally outside its own headquarters!

Lynch leads a union with 80,000 members playing a key role in transportation and with the power to bring the rail network to a grinding halt. The RMT also has members in the Royal Fleet Auxiliary which is providing support to the Royal Navy during its operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea.

Walkouts are planned at schools and universities, but only of pupils and students. Thanks to the education unions, the workers themselves—the teachers and academic staff—will not take part. The fact that the National Education Union and the University and

College Union are sponsors of the “day of action” underlies the cynicism of the whole event.

The common position of the trade unions is that nothing must be done which falls foul of anti-democratic anti-strike laws that should have been challenged and defeated long ago, or which contradicts their loyal support for the Labour Party.

Sir Keir Starmer is far and away the most hated and despised figure among workers and youth opposing the Gaza genocide, with many leaving the party in protest at its defence of Israel. But Lynch and company call on “our Labour Party” to “stand with the people”.

The lie that Starmer’s pro-war, pro-genocide party can somehow be pressured into opposing Israeli policy is part and parcel of the unions’ refusal to organise mass strikes, which would immediately force a confrontation between the working class seeking to defend the Palestinians and the equally bitterly opposed Tory and Labour parties.

The international working class is the only social force capable of taking on the imperialist powers and defeating them; its mobilisation can stop the genocide in Gaza. Instead, students and young people are being asked to stand alone—including braving the repression meted out to students for opposing the Israeli genocide—to cover for the refusal of the trade unions to mount a fight.

For many students this will be their first experience of political struggle, but it will not be their last. This generation is being driven to fight against genocide, and against the wider danger posed by NATO’s wars waged in Ukraine and the Middle East targeting Russia, China and Iran.

They are in a battle to defend education, to protect the National Health Service, maintain vital services, secure decent jobs and wages, and reverse the worsening climate catastrophe.

One of the most important lessons to be learned is that in the trade union bureaucracy, the Labour Party and their various apologists, they confront a hostile conspiracy. The trade unions do not represent the working class; they are a straitjacket on its struggles for peace, equality and justice.

The task before those involved in the protest movement over Gaza is to mobilise workers *independently* of these organisations, *against* their efforts to restrain action and drag their members into

the political cesspit of the Labour Party.

This has been the perspective of the IYSSE from the beginning, and we have organised a national series of meetings this month to discuss with students and young people how to put it into practice. Our statement on the meetings concludes:

“Ending the mass murder and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and opposing the expanding war waged by the NATO powers and their proxies demands a global, socialist anti-war movement. Students and young people must take the lead in turning out to factories and workplaces, arguing for working-class action, including strikes and boycotts of arms companies, docks and airports, and for a political struggle against the Tory government and the equally criminal Labour Party.”

We encourage all those participating in today’s protests to make plans to attend.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact