

Up to 250,000 protest in London against Israeli genocide

Robert Stevens
18 February 2024

Up to 250,000 protested in London Saturday as part of a global day of action against Israel's genocide against Gaza. Protests were held in 145 cities across six continents, with major demonstrations in Istanbul and Madrid. Tens of thousands demonstrated in Glasgow and Dublin.

The London demonstration marched from Marble Arch to close to the Israeli Embassy. Hours before it was to start, the Metropolitan Police warned that 1,500 officers had been mobilised and Public Order Act restrictions would be in place. They didn't have the power to ban the protest or reroute it, they stressed, but were prepared to use extensive legal powers to clamp down.

In the end they decided against too heavy repression, given the massive numbers that turned up for the ninth national UK protest against the genocide and the ongoing international opposition of millions to Israel's mass murder and ethnic cleansing.

With a ground invasion of Rafah by the Israel Defence Forces imminent, Britain has joined various imperialist powers in verbally opposing Israel's plans to attack the location of one million displaced and starving Palestinians.

On Tuesday, a ceasefire resolution is being brought before the United Nations, which the US is expected to bloc using its veto powers. And on Wednesday, the Scottish National Party (SNP) is again bringing a ceasefire resolution before parliament that Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer previously whacked his party to oppose. He and Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak have advanced the alternative of a "sustainable" ceasefire, by which they mean for the genocide to continue. Speaking Sunday at the Scottish Labour conference—which passed a motion calling for an immediate ceasefire—Starmer said there had to be "an

end to the fighting. Not just for now, not just for a pause, but permanently. A ceasefire that lasts. That is what must happen now. The fighting must stop now."

The protest was advertised as going to the Embassy but was prevented from getting within 100 metres of it by the Metropolitan Police. This was only the second time since Israel began airstrikes on Gaza in October that a protest directed at the Israeli Embassy was allowed.

To try and taint the march as being threatening to Jews, the police demanded organisers put back the assembly time for an hour, "to accommodate an event at a synagogue along the route." Protesters marched down Park Lane adjacent to Hyde Park, staying close to the perimeter, and through Knightsbridge and Kensington Road before ending at the junction with Kensington Court, where a stage was set up.

Police made 12 arrests during the day, starting with snatching a protester from the march as it was forming to leave Park Lane, alleging she was carrying a banner supportive of a proscribed terrorist organisation. (See X posting below). Two of the arrests were of protesters wearing face masks, which the government intends to criminalise in upcoming legislation—with those on demonstrations who disregard police orders to remove them facing a fine of up to £1,000 and a month in prison. It has been left unclear whether this applies to personal protection masks.

Police already have powers to ask individuals to remove face coverings at designated protests and made the two arrests before the new laws have been enacted.

Met spotters took photos from inside buildings and from rooftops in Kensington as demonstrators listened to the speeches.

There is media speculation that Starmer may agree a formulation with the SNP vague enough for Labour

MPs to support it, avoiding a repetition of the rebellion by 56 of his MPs in November, including eight members of his frontbench who resigned or were sacked by Starmer. But Labour remains in lockstep with the Tories in doing exactly what is demanded of them by British and US imperialism.

Nevertheless, the Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign organisers of the London rallies have sought to corral opposition to the genocide by insisting that the only role for protesters is to keep up the pressure on the government and, above all, the Labour Party to back a ceasefire call like France and several imperialist powers have done, but which has no impact on Israel's ongoing offensive.

This was the again main theme of Saturday's speech. Stop the War convenor Lindsey German—leader of the pseudo-left Counterfire—told the rally, “Just a word to our politicians, Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer... any MP who doesn't vote for a ceasefire on Wednesday should be eternally shamed for what they have done. My message to them is no ceasefire, no vote [in the general election to be held later this year].”

Stop the War figurehead Jeremy Corbyn, the former Labour leader who was expelled from the parliamentary party three years ago on bogus antisemitism charges by Starmer, said, “I want every one of you here, demand, demand of your elected representative [to] be there and vote for a ceasefire. No ifs, no buts, no qualifications, just call for a complete ceasefire.”

Corbyn's former shadow chancellor, John McDonnell, appealed to the genocide backers entirely on moral grounds, declaring, “I say this to my colleagues in Parliament, vote with your conscience, vote for peace, vote for a ceasefire... in this vote we can say very clearly in our thousands, in our millions, we are all Palestinians.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact