

Video Report: Workers and youth speak out at UK demonstrations against Israel's genocide in Gaza

Our reporters

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WSWS reporters spoke to some of those attending the rallies in London, Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds last Saturday against Israel's genocidal onslaught on Gaza.

London

In London, around 200,000 protesters assembled at Russell Square before marching down the Strand and ending up in Trafalgar Square where a rally was held.

As the march formed up, University College London students chanted “Keir Starmer killer you, Tony was a killer too” referring to Tony Blair and pointing to the current and historic crimes committed by the Labour Party in service of British imperialism.

Manchester

In Manchester, more than 500 marched from Piccadilly Gardens through the city centre to the HOME cultural centre where a rally was held. HOME was chosen because last week it cancelled, after a filthy campaign by Zionist forces, an event that was to showcase the work of Palestinian writers. Actors Maxine Peake and Kingsley Ben-Adir—who recently played Bob Marley in a popular biopic—were among those due to have performed at the event on April 22.

Sheffield

Around 150 protested outside Sheffield Town Hall.

Retired worker **Alan** said, “It's another example of how America brings peace to the Middle East. They tell the Israelis ‘if you run out of ammunition—give us a call. That's exactly what they're doing, sending 2,000 lb bombs.’”

Nesrin came with her siblings and mother to the rally. Her family are from Gaza and her brother, **Abdallah**, had written a moving poem about how he felt watching the atrocities taking place in his hometown and his hopes for peace. He read to the audience:

*Where the sun rises and the moon falls
Where the stars shine brightly in the night sky
Where the people are waiting for those who were martyred
Where the children cry
Where the mothers wait
Where the fathers gather
There will be freedom one day
The lies will not last
The truth will be shown
Palestine will be known
Where the people wait
Where the war rages
Who we pray for will win indeed
Patience is needed
But freedom is guaranteed
Who will lose a loved one next
Who will be imprisoned next
Who will be martyred
Who will be bombed
Who will be found
Who will be forgotten in the rubble to lay silent and forgotten*

Abdallah explained to the WSWS that his school had been supportive of his rights to freedom of expression and on non-uniform days he has been allowed to wear his Palestine badges along with other students to show their solidarity and empathy.

His sister **Tasnim** said, “When I saw the October 7 attack by Hamas I was worried about its implications. I was not surprised by what has followed; it was only a matter of time that war would be unleashed due to the situation that Gazans have been subjected to for many years.

“The Israeli government were told that the Hamas attack was going to happen. The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] made a statement that they were instructed to shoot into houses regardless of whether there were captives or not. Many of the Israeli deaths were caused by the IDF and evidence supports this.

“The response by western powers was not surprising but

demoralising. Yes, they had the right to condemn the loss of innocent lives but not to raise or acknowledge the context of what happened is wrong. Context is very important. There have been killings on both sides and I don't defend violence but the Israeli government have openly verbalised their hatred towards Arabs and Palestinians and called for Gaza to be flattened.

"I think the protests are important, to show governments that there are people who oppose the funding of Israel and its genocide. The money should be redirected to better causes.

"I think the wars and interventions in the Middle East for over 20 years now are aimed at promoting the idea that people in Middle East are the problem. There have been so many years of war in that region and this is not helpful to move forward as a society and it reiterates and promotes divisions.

"I agree with the need for international unity and a global programme. There is much that can be done; you see people being enlisted into the IDF and they can refuse to go to war with Palestinians as some have done already.

"I think being called antisemitic for protesting is wrong. Antisemitism may have increased because of the war as people are angry and it is wrong to be antisemitic. But the governments and media are calling those who fight to defend Palestinians antisemites in an attempt to shut them down and it's damaging the genuine issues around antisemitism."

Fran has attended several demonstrations since October 7 and campaigned for Palestinian rights for over 10 years.

"We see the same issues for decades. Nothing has changed, it's an ongoing occupation for over 75 years. Today however we witness a massive escalation in the repression of the Palestinian people. The world is watching a forced starvation of an entire people. This is a deliberate tactic. Food aid could easily get in, but this is a deliberate choice. Ethnic cleansing, genocide and forced famine is what we are witnessing.

"I find it very shocking. I can't believe this is happening. You can see the evidence all over social media. The UN ceasefire resolution is an absolute joke. It has taken six months and is only a symbolic move. It is meaningless and always was going to be. I think western governments are feeling pressure to do something. It's like them saying: 'Okay are you happy now?' They are not willing to intervene to prevent the atrocities from happening. They could, for example, stop the sale of weapons. We are coming out every week, they are feeling the pressure, but it still changes nothing."

Speaking about the support for the Gaza genocide by the Labour Party, Fran said, "I have been a Labour voter always and I am not going to vote for them; their position is an absolute disgrace. [Party leader Sir Keir] Starmer's position is totally unacceptable to me.

"I am originally from Germany. I think developments there have been a real wake up call for me. Previously I was under a false illusion that Germany as a culture and society had learned from the mistakes of the past. I was probably naïve to think that. What is happening there now shows that absolutely nothing has been learnt from what happened in the Holocaust, which is devastating to see.

"In the UK whilst there is a big effort to crack down on these protests, and there have been arrests, we have still been able to go

out and march. In Germany protests are banned and Palestinian activists have been arrested. You have the irony of German police going after Jewish supporters of the Palestinians. This is mind blowing as they claim they are fighting antisemitism. Antisemitism is being used to justify racism against Muslim communities. Since 2005 and the Syrian war this has escalated and unmasked the German government's anti-Muslim racism. History is repeating itself, which is tragic."

Nadia, an infancy feeding nurse, came with her son Zakariya. She said, "I have come to show my solidarity with all the children and families in Palestine, to say this is totally wrong. There is no ceasefire, the UN vote was just a pathetic attempt to try and win people over, I have no confidence in it.

"There is starvation now in Gaza. In the year 2024 this should not happen. There is nowhere for Palestinians to go. They keep telling them to evacuate, evacuate to where? Wherever they go, the bombs follow. The UK government is supporting this. The Labour Party are disgusting. People should not vote for them and should only support candidates who oppose the war. This is a long hard fight but hopefully we can win."

Leeds

At the demonstration outside Leeds City Hall, **Flyn** said, "What is happening in Palestine is a monstrosity on humankind. We fought wars against fascism but now we are complicit in it. Nowadays there is so much media covering it but it is still going on. With the media we have power to inform people of this but they have powers in place stopping any help to the Palestinians."

Tyler added, "How can a government stand by and watch the slaughter of women and babies happen? It's all about greed, about money and corrupt governments. The things that we have fought against all the years are coming round again".

Asked what he thought workers should do to oppose the genocide, Tyler said, "We do what we are doing today, getting our voices out there and coming together and saying what needs to be said. You can't stay silent.

"If you could get the working class to come together across the world that would be absolutely fantastic, we are the majority, we have true power. The Labour Party has become the second Tory party, the least extreme version, which is not saying much, they want to make us into slaves."

On talk in ruling circles to bring back conscription, he argued, "People don't want to fight any more, we don't want to fight in a rich man's war, they are putting working-class lives at risk with them being complicit in the wars".



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