

200,000 march in London against genocide in Gaza but offered no perspective by organisers

Robert Stevens
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Around 200,000 people marched for Palestine in London on Saturday for the 12th national demonstration. Protesters assembled in Parliament Square and proceeded up Whitehall, past Downing Street and through central London to a rally in Hyde Park.

Protesters were enthused and encouraged by the student demonstrations and occupations in the United States that have spread globally. When references were made from the platform to the student protests around the world, including one at the UK's Warwick University, the crowd applauded and cheered.

Those attending were above all determined to register their opposition to advanced plans for an assault on Rafah, the location of 1.2 million refugees from the north of Gaza.

The *Socialist Worker* published the results of a survey it carries out at the national demonstrations, extrapolating that thousands of newer forces galvanised by the horrors of the imperialist backed genocide are attending. It reported, "16,000 people were on their first national march on Saturday. And there is also a large core of very regular protesters who have been part of the marches from the start and stuck with them. Nearly a third said they have been on all the demos or all but one."

This determination to fight among millions contrasts with the political neutering of the mass movement by the leaders of the protests in the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) and pseudo-left groups such as the Socialist Workers Party, which is the publisher of the *Socialist Worker*.

To the extent that any demands are put forward from the platform other than to keep demonstrating in the streets, it is that everyone rely on the trade unions to lead the fight against the opposition to genocide and

that the dwindling number of Labour lefts convince the Labour Party to break its alliance with Washington and Jerusalem and support a permanent ceasefire.

The only current MP from the party who spoke at Saturday's protest was Apsana Begum. Yet again, Begum was studious in refusing to mention party leader Sir Keir Starmer's support for the genocide.

Jeremy Corbyn, the former Labour leader expelled from the parliamentary party by Starmer over four years ago, made a speech almost bereft of politics. The parson of the official anti-war movement, who can criticise no-one, Corbyn stated, "Our movement has come about from all shades of opinion, and all parts of this countries and all other countries. We're a movement for global peace and global justice in opposition to the arms trade and the cynical decisions that are costing the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians."

A feature of the coverage of the rally by the Stop the War Coalition was its claims that the trade unions are now moving into struggle. Posts on its X account on Saturday included the claim of a "Massive turnout on today's trade union bloc ahead of #MayDay4Palestine on Wednesday."

Another, from Sean Vernell, a leading Socialist Workers Party member and high-up bureaucrat in the University and College Union—reposted by the STWC—read, "The movement for a free Palestine continues to grow as does the support from within the trade union movement. Next step May 1st workplace day of action: Solidarity with Palestine - Defend the right to strike and protest."

No such mass movement organised by the unions exists. The "trade union bloc" on the last few marches has consisted of members of branches where the pseudo-left have some influence, with a few banners brought

along. There were no national banners of the two largest unions in Britain (Unison and Unite) on the protest, only one representing the London and Eastern region of Unite. Instead of a Unite national banner, at the head of the trade union bloc was a “Unite Members Say Stop the War” banner.

This was necessary because Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham refuses to support the protests. Graham wrote to union officials earlier this month opposing groups involved in attempts to disrupt arms supplies from the UK to Israel and stating that Unite would have nothing to do with anything threatening to “undermine the defence industry or demand the disbandment of NATO and AUKUS [the Australian, British and US military alliance against China].”

Far from the unions rallying their 5 million-plus membership, the Trades Union Congress does not back the marches, with leader Paul Nowak not appearing at a single protest. No national trade union leader spoke at this week’s demonstration.

The claim that the unions were raring to go was even punctured from the platform by Libby Nolan, President of Unison, who said, “This is a trade union moment that the trade unions should be rising to. This a moment for our unions to pressure our government and incoming shadow [Labour] government to do something to call for a ceasefire now”. Stating that it was nearly three months since the International Court of Justice “found it plausible” that Israel had committed genocide, she urged “the trade union movement must put more pressure on, it must do more.”

That the unions are organising nothing is tacitly acknowledged in the call by the Stop the War Coalition for action on May 1, which is centred on individual workers themselves organising events. No industrial action is being taken by any union in defence of the Palestinians, with STWC listing just eight events nationally, including four in the capital.

The London events are: a “Hammersmith and Fulham Council Unison Workplace Day of Action for Palestine @ 1-2pm”; a “lunchtime walkout at St. George’s Hospital, Tooting”; a rally to be confirmed, and held after work at 5pm at Guy’s Campus, King’s College London, and another 5pm rally at King’s College Hospital.

The promotion for the May 1 Day of Action by the

STWC makes no criticism whatsoever of the union bureaucracy, urging only that workers “Gauge what action best fits your circumstances,” including a possible 30-minute stoppage outside the workplace, a lunchtime gathering, or “If you don’t work in an industry that has lunch-breaks as such, find out when most are free after work...”

Concluding the rally was PSC leader Ben Jamal, who made reference to the first demonstration in London in support of the Palestinians, also held in Hyde Park, in 1921. He said that the movement was a success because it was “bringing the people with us and *piling the pressure on the political establishment.*”

Many of those demonstrating do so despite, not because of, the rotten politics of the STWC leadership. They also know that the central demand to “Stop Arming Israel” can only be successful if directed to workers in the arms industry, haulage, the ports and airports. However, the pseudo-left and Stalinist groups in the STWC sabotage such a struggle with their insistence that the trade unions and their corrupt, pro capitalist, pro-war leaders be allowed to determine what happens without challenge.

All workers and youth opposed to genocide and the many students now returning to campus must take forward a struggle independently from and against the trade union bureaucracy, and all those appealing to the “political establishment”.

Those who understand the urgent need for a political turn to the working class should contact and join the Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality. To understand the political perspective on which a new mass socialist anti-war movement must be based, register to attend the May 4 online May Day rally of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact