

London Gaza protest directed to pathetic appeals for Starmer Labour government to change course

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Around 100,000 people took part in a march through London Saturday in the 17th national protest Israel's genocide in Gaza.

Taking place amid the deepening threat of a US-led regional war against Iran and the whipping up of fascist mobs against Muslims in Britain, organisers the Stop the War Coalition (STWC), Palestine Solidarity Campaign and others such as the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) doubled down on their efforts to channel anti-genocide and anti-war sentiment into the dead end of appeals to the Labour Party to back a ceasefire, end arms sales to Israel and recognize Palestine.

Using the occasion of the election of a Labour government, the main slogan of the march was, "Tell Starmer: Stop arming Israel End the genocide No Middle East war". It assembled on Park Lane, near Hyde Park and passed by Trafalgar Square before stopping outside Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's residence at 10 Downing Street. There was a significant police presence throughout, following threats of provocations from far-right thugs.

"Evidence" presented that the strategy of pressuring Labour is working centered on reporting the government's promise to suspend "some" arms sales to Israel, restore funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and withdraw opposition to the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The SWP lauded the promised suspension on Tuesday, saying, "It's a sign that Labour can be pushed to concede to demands— if people fight for them". By the time the rally was held. However, it was already clear that the promise was worthless.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy declared that he wants to make a distinction between weapons used by Israel for the war in Gaza and those used "defensively", citing the alleged Hezbollah attack on the Golan Heights last weekend. Any arms sales suspension would therefore be "deferred" until a review into whether there was a clear risk of a breach of international humanitarian law.

The restoration of funding for UNRWA is equally meaningless, given that Israel has relentlessly bombed and destroyed its facilities in Gaza, including its headquarters.

Lammy made clear the token character of his call for a ceasefire and similar poses of neutrality by visiting Israel and shaking hands Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant even as the Israel Defense Forces were busy slaughtering Palestinians.

The only MP at the rally was Apsana Begum, a member of the rump Socialist Campaign Group, who two weeks ago was suspended from the Labour Party for six months for voting to scrap the two-child benefit cap, pending a review. Even in her new position as an independent MP, she could not bring herself to utter any word of criticism of Starmer's Labour Party—not even in her own defence—limiting herself to useless appeals for a ceasefire and the recognition of a Palestinian state.

Liz Wheatley, secretary of the Camden branch of the public sector UNISON trade union, said, "Last time I stood on a platform here in Whitehall, as Rafah was being bombed, we had a Tory government. A government full of bigots. A government representing their friends in the City and their friends the arms dealers." She might have said, "This time I am stood on

a platform as Rafah is being bombed with the support of a government of bigots and friends of the City and arms dealers headed by Keir Starmer.”

Instead, she merely stated that “The government may have changed but our demands haven’t. So, we demand of Keir Starmer an immediate permanent ceasefire now. Stop the sale of arms to Israel and recognise the Palestinian state.”

The president of the Public and Commercial Services union Martin Cavanagh condemned the genocide, as well as the fascists riots that have taken place in Britain during the past week but did not mention the Labour government at all.

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn—elected as an independent in the general election after being expelled by Starmer—made no appearance this time, instead sending a message in which he asked pathetically, “How much more incentive do President Biden and Prime Minister Starmer need to halt arms supplies to Israel?”

To bolster their international credentials, the organisers gave a platform to Jérôme Legavre, a French deputy from the France Unbowed/La France Insoumise (LFI) party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

He highlighted the line-up of NATO governments supporting the genocide: “This is a true barbarity, orchestrated by Netanyahu, with the complicity and military aid of Biden in the United States, Macron in France, Scholz in Germany, Sunak and now Starmer in Great Britain. Without forgetting the responsibility of the governments of the Arab countries in the Middle East.” He continued: “A few days ago, just before the opening of the Olympic Games, Emmanuel Macron welcomed the President of Israel, the one who signed the bombs that shatter the children of Gaza. Macron continues to send weapons to Israel. He continues, like many others, his disgusting campaign of defamation and slander, by shamefully accusing us of antisemitism, to try to silence us”.

What Legavre failed to explain is that Macron has denied the LFI and its New Popular Front alliance with the Communist Party and Socialist Party the right to form a government as the largest party in the National Assembly and is running as a de facto dictator, while he conducts clandestine discussions with the fascist National Rally of Marine Le Pen. If even this outpouring of popular support does not move these

pseudo-left outfits to organise anything more substantial than plaintive appeals to the ruling class, then nothing will.

The rally ended with more “proof” that the pressure campaign is working, with Palestine Solidarity Campaign director Ben Jamal reporting the “breaking news” that King’s College became the first university in London that “divested” from Israel, that the Walton Forest Pension Fund announced that it will divest from all complicit companies and that Islington Council has announced that it is dropping its contract with Barclays Bank. Such actions will have zero effect in saving any lives in Gaza

In contrast to the empty appeals of the rally’s organisers, the Socialist Equality Party circulated as a leaflet the WSWS perspective statement, “Build the socialist opposition to Starmer’s right-wing government!”

The perspective explains that workers and young people must build a revolutionary movement that harnesses the broad opposition to the Gaza genocide as the starting point for a struggle against the Labour government and its programme of imperialist war. This is the only way to stop the genocide and prevent the descent of society deeper and deeper into barbarism.



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