

Gaza protest in Liverpool seeks to pressure Labour government

Our reporters

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The nineteenth national rally to oppose the US/UK-backed Israeli genocide against the Palestinians was held in Liverpool, UK on Saturday, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Palestinian Forum in Britain, Friends of Al-Aqsa, Stop the War Coalition, Muslim Association of Britain and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. The event, held under the slogan “End the genocide in Gaza! Stop arming Israel!”, took place outside the venue of the Labour Party conference which began the following day.

As with previous marches, the political aim of the Liverpool rally was to promote the illusion that the ethnic cleansing of the Gazans could be ended by exerting popular pressure onto the government of Labour Party leader Keir Starmer, which fully backs the Zionist regime even as it escalates the war into the West Bank and Lebanon. This perspective of protest politics has led the movement into a dead-end.

Mick Whelan, the General Secretary of the ASLEF train drivers’ union addressed the rally, despite the failure of the trade unions to organise action to oppose the slaughter. He stated, “War crimes are being committed every single day. Displacing a civilian population is a war crime. Killing tens of thousands of children and civilian people is a war crime. Crushing every university, every home, and every hospital so they can never be used again, is a war crime.” He made no call for industrial action aimed at pressuring the Labour government.

“This march is about what we believe about ourselves and future generations. This is what we believe about international socialism. If we do right by the Palestinian people, we’ll stop racism, we’ll stop apartheid, we’ll stop genocide.” The ASLEF union is affiliated to the Labour Party, which backs the genocide and has a right-wing, anti-immigrant agenda for its new administration.

Amid much criticism of Labour, many speakers offered advice to the party to change its ways.

Ben Jamal, director of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, spoke of a “genocide unique in human history for being live-streamed, broadcasting across all of our screens images we will not forget.” The political perspective of the organisation he leads is based on altering the foreign policy of the British imperialist state, rather than challenging the rule of the corporate elite.

Jamal declared, “A Labour government should be sanctioning Israel, not promising it an enhanced trade deal. A Labour government should be cutting all arms sales, not shipping weapons to be used in a genocide. A Labour government should be shaming and sanctioning the British companies that support this illegality, not inviting them to hold stalls at their conference as they are doing this week with Barclays bank.” He failed to explain why Starmer’s government, the end product of a systematic pro-big business evolution of that party, is playing such a murderous role or why they might be convinced to change course.

Lindsey German of the Stop the War Coalition (STWC) explained the protesters were there “to say to Keir Starmer ‘do not support genocide’, ‘do not support an apartheid state’, ‘stop arming Israel’, ‘stop allowing Israel to do what it does.’ This week is the most important week to do so because we saw state terror on behalf of the Israeli government. Keir Starmer has not condemned what has gone on in Lebanon, and that is a disgrace because it’s a war crime. Starmer, the man who took away the winter fuel allowance, is going to increase spending on the military and so-called defence, including sending parts for F-35s to Israel.”

“People say: what’s the point of marching? It says to the people of Gaza that we’re with them. It says to our

government that we're not going to put up with it. Starmer should not think that we won't get rid of him and Lammy, unless they change their policies."

Kim Johnson, Labour MP for Liverpool Riverside, was the only speaker to raise the October 7 2023 attack. Her attempt to present Labour in parliament in a positive light was met with boos from the crowd. "It's almost a year since the Hamas attack on Israel. I am a Labour MP and I have fought for a ceasefire."

"Yes, you will boo me but I am one of the new Labour MPs that has asked for a ceasefire and a return of humanitarian aid." As the marchers shouted "Out! Out! Out!" she yelled back, "I am a black, working-class woman from Liverpool and I've fought racism all of my life," as if this justified her unprincipled membership of a right-wing party of war and big business. Increasingly angry, she concluded, "I will not be silenced by *you*, or the government!"

Ian Byrne was the only other member of Parliament and the Labour Party to appear and has been suspended as a Labour MP for backing an opposition motion aiming to scrap the two-child benefit cap. He did not mention his suspension or Starmer or the Labour Party by name. He said Gaza was a "moral test for the new government [one of many including they have failed repeatedly] and I call on them today to stand up for the implementation of international law and be bold in confronting those who undermine it."

Jérôme Legavre, a deputy from La France Insoumise (France Unbowed, LFI), the party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, denounced the role of the US, UK, and French governments in the genocide but offered no politically-independent programme for the working class to fight back. He stated, "Without the weapons supplied by Biden, Starmer, and Macron the massacre in Gaza and the West Bank would be impossible. We must step up our mobilisation for ceasefire to stop this genocide. Stop arms deliveries!"

"The power of your demonstrations is a very strong encouragement in France, where Macron's government represses and seeks to intimidate those fighting to oppose the massacre of Palestinians. This power was expressed at the TUC annual congress and I welcome the motion adopted for an immediate ceasefire to put an end to all arms licences to Israel." In fact, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) has organised a toothless protest stunt on October 10 to cover up the complicity

of the union bureaucracy in the production and export of weapons which it has done nothing to oppose.

Socialist Equality Party members distributed the statement

"Opposing Gaza genocide demands a political struggle against the Starmer government" and explained to protesters that only an independent political intervention by the international working class can halt the imperialist war machine and bring down the bourgeois governments that have their hands soaked in blood. They argued that only by building a mass socialist party of the working class can a global anti-war movement stop the genocide in Gaza.



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