

175,000 march for Palestine in London, more empty speeches from the platform

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175,000 people marched this Saturday in the 24th UK national demonstration against Israel's war on the Palestinians.

The total was larger than recent turnouts, reflecting popular outrage over US President Donald Trump's open endorsement of ethnic cleansing and his encouragement of Israel to let "all hell break out" in Gaza. Protesters also denounced Sir Keir Starmer's Labour government for its continuing support of the war criminals in the Israeli government and its genuflecting before Trump.

Thousands took copies of the Socialist Equality Party's leaflet "Trump's plan to annex Gaza and the return of imperialist barbarism" and large numbers stopped at the SEP's stall to buy literature and discuss the way forward in the fight against genocide and war. Many were supportive of the SEP's analysis and programme for a socialist anti-war movement of the international working class. They were particularly moved by the case of anti-war activist and Trotskyist Bogdan Syrotiuk, imprisoned for his political activity in Ukraine.

As ever, a gulf separated the militant sentiment among the workers and young people marching and the bankrupt politics on offer from the organisers of the event. Only a small percentage stopped to listen to the speeches at the rally near to the US Embassy delivered by *Guardian* journalist Owen Jones, suspended Labour MP Zarah Sultana, National Education Union leader Daniel Kabede, Palestine Solidarity Campaign leader Ben Jamal and others.

The line of argument was summed up by the Stalinist Andrew Murray, speaking on behalf of the Stop the War Coalition. He declared, "We have to be clear: the Palestinian people will be going nowhere, we will stand with them.

"And if they have kept their flag of independence and liberation flying in the face of the British empire and 78 years of Israeli colonialism, aggressive and apartheid, a superannuated New York property developer is not going to defeat them."

This is a prayer, not a political perspective. Whether the Palestinian people will be freed from occupation and oppression or ethnically cleansed is not an article of faith but a question of struggle, perspective and political leadership.

The Palestinians face disaster due to the decades of bankrupt leadership by the bourgeois nationalist Fatah, which created the basis for the disastrous political dominance of the Islamist Hamas in Gaza.

The leadership required is one which can mobilise an international movement of Palestinian and Israeli, Jewish and Arab, workers as part of a global socialist struggle of the working class against imperialism and its client states—including the complicit Arab regimes.

This is essential in a world being plunged into the barbarism of a new struggle for the redivision of the world, its people and resources—a reality which Murray obscures by presenting the genocide in Gaza as more of the same experience of the last 78 years, rather than the step-change in Israeli and imperialist foreign policy in the Middle East it really is.

Israel's crimes have been carried out as part of a wider operation backed by the US aimed at crushing the "Axis of Resistance" led by Iran, as a prelude to more direct military aggression against that country. Washington sees Iran as an obstacle on its way to a confrontation with China aimed at neutralising its challenge to American hegemony.

Bringing an end to any even nominally Palestinian controlled territory is a key part of this plan, with Israel now escalating its annexationist moves and ethnic

cleansing in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Trump is an enthusiastic backer of this agenda, spearheaded by the most right-wing sections of the Israeli ruling class and population, with whom his administration shares close ties. And he has enormous powers at his disposal to help see it enacted.

He is not simply a “superannuated New York property developer”; he is the President of the United States, proceeding with a plan to overthrow any constitutional checks on his executive authority and grant himself the status of a dictator. Israel has just taken receipt of the next shipment of 2,000 bombs—held up by former President Joe Biden amid popular outrage—and cleared by Trump within days of taking office.

Defeating the threat posed by US imperialism and its fascist-Zionist proxy forces requires the organisation of a massive social force: the international working class. But the speakers at the national demonstrations write their speeches to exclude any mention of this decisive factor in the world situation.

Nowhere is this more evident than with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who told the crowd, much like Murray, “The Palestinian people cannot, will not and never will be moved away from Palestine.”

The assault on Gaza had “shown that people are defiant and will not disappear.” Palestinians returning to “piles of rubble and the sewage flowing in the streets and the dead bodies being discovered underneath it” would “do it with hope, they’ll do it with love, they’ll do it with affection. And the next generation of Palestinian children will also write poetry and play music. And they will inspire the rest of the world.

“Our solidarity must never stop. Our demonstrations will go on as long as the occupation goes on. We are forever friends of the Palestinian people.”

What is on offer here for workers and young people appalled by the crimes they have witnessed for more than a year and wanting to bring their perpetrators to justice and put an end to this oppression once and for all? Political programme is replaced by a sermon.

For solidarity with the Palestinians to mean anything in Britain, it must be the solidarity of a new socialist movement in the working class, the first principle of which would be a relentless political fight against the Labour government, which Corbyn once again did not mention.

As for Murray, he reiterated the futile appeal, made again and again for the past 16 months of mass slaughter, “Let us also say to our government, Starmer and Lammy. Silence is complicity. Condemn Trump’s plan out loud now or you are accomplices to ethnic cleansing and genocide.”

The reality, as everyone knows, is that Starmer and Lammy have not been silent, but are vocal supporters of both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and his mass-murdering campaign of “self-defence”, and of Donald Trump. Murray is trying to persuade his listeners that these right-wing reactionaries—genocide-supporters in the Middle East, warmongers in Ukraine, anti-migrant xenophobes at home—can be forced by moral appeals to abandon such policies.

The turn by the imperialist powers to the most naked forms of colonialism and predatory militarist agendas—fuelled by austerity at home and coupled with the boosting of the far-right—will give rise to explosive social struggles. This process will provide the basis for a revival of the class struggle, anti-war traditions of the working class, which must be fought for by socialist workers and youth.

It is on this process that the liberation of the Palestinians, and all oppressed and war-torn peoples, depends.



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