

Socialist Equality Party mobilises support for Mahmoud Khalil's freedom at UK anti-war demonstration

Robert Stevens
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The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality campaigned at Saturday's Gaza genocide protest in London to demand the immediate release of Mahmoud Khalil by the Trump administration in the United States.

On March 8, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agents ambushed Khalil—a Columbia graduate and prominent advocate for last year's campus protests against the Gaza genocide—and his wife, an American citizen, in the lobby of their building.

They snatched Khalil, threatened his wife with arrest and transported Khalil to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) holding cell in Elizabeth, New Jersey. Even as his lawyers filed a habeas corpus motion in Manhattan, he was secretly flown 1,300 miles away to a private detention centre in Louisiana. Khalil was “disappeared” without any charge, despite being a legal permanent resident of the US and a green card holder.

Another anti-genocide protester, Leqaa Kordia, a West Bank Palestinian and current Columbia student, was snatched on Friday by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

SEP members distributed copies of the March 10 WSWs editorial board statement: “Free Mahmoud Khalil! Mobilize the working class against Trump's dictatorship!” March participants came to the SEP's stall to express their support for Khalil's freedom and hear a genuine socialist perspective against war.

Another protester said, “I have been watching the case of Mahmoud very closely. They are only targeting Mahmoud because he is a student and they know students especially in America are the heaviest voices. So let us hope other students stand up behind him,

whether you believe in Palestine or not this is about humanity.”

Actor Khalid Abdalla—who played Dodi Fayed in the fifth and sixth seasons of *The Crown*—spoke from the platform of Khalil's fate. Abdalla was one of the speakers at the brutally repressed January 18 March for Palestine rally in London, who then had to attend an interview at a police station.

Abdalla said, “This world looks a lot like the rise of fascism in the 1930s, and yes it looks a lot like McCarthyite America.

“And yes this is a genocide. And this is why Jewish people around the world, who see this moment for what it is, are in solidarity with the movement for Palestinian liberation in unprecedented numbers, true to the most extraordinary Jewish traditions. Most recently taking over Trump Tower to free Mahmoud Khalil. Free Mahmoud Khalil! Just as they did in Penn Station and in the college campuses in Columbia, in America and around the world, and here today in every part of this movement.”

The fight for Khalil's freedom has won widespread support, with over half a million signing petitions demanding his release and 1.2 million people participating in a letter-writing campaign launched by on-campus groups.

The campaign can only be successful to the extent that it turns to the working class. As the WSWs Editorial Board statement calling for his freedom states:

“The attack on Khalil takes place in the context of mass layoffs of tens of thousands of federal workers by Trump and Elon Musk, the elimination of all restraints on corporate exploitation, and a frontal assault on social programs like Medicaid and Social Security. The

assault on democratic rights is inseparably connected to the deepening war preparations—from Trump’s calls to annex Greenland and Canada to his backing of Israel’s ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people.”

It continued, “Students cannot be left to fight alone. This fight must be taken into the working class. Khalil is a member of the United Auto Workers (UAW), yet the UAW leadership has remained silent. Rank-and-file workers must act. Graduate students in the UAW, along with autoworkers, educators, Amazon workers, healthcare workers, and every section of the working class must take up the fight for Khalil’s freedom.”

Saturday’s march, attended by around 50,000, and led by organisations including the Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign, was the 25th national rally held in London since Israel’s genocide began. It was significantly smaller than recent national rallies, firstly due to police repression, fuelled by demands in ruling circles that the protests against the war be criminalised.

However, the dwindling numbers are also due to participants being given no perspective from organisers on which to oppose the genocide in Gaza and the expanding war in the Middle East.

Once again, no link was drawn between the Gaza genocide and opposition to war in Ukraine. Stop the War convenor Lindsey German declared that the genocide was supported by “Donald Trump and by Keir Starmer here in London.”

Without mentioning the word “Ukraine”, she added obliquely that Starmer “wants to take the world into a bigger and bigger war, spending more and more on arms while the disabled people are having their benefits cut, when the pensioners are freezing and where the children are suffering because they won’t lift the cap on the two child benefits.”

German stated, “We want an end to the attacks on the Palestinian people, but we don’t want a war in Europe, we don’t want another war in the Middle East.” The war in Europe she doesn’t “want”, led by the NATO powers, has been waged in Ukraine against Russia for three years now. It has not been mentioned once by Stop the War from the platform in 15 months of the anti-Gazan war protests!

Stop the War’s duplicity was epitomised by the presence of John McDonnell, former shadow chancellor under Jeremy Corbyn’s leadership of the

Labour Party, who was skulking around Saturday’s protest. He is a warmonger who demonstrably broke with the Stop the War Coalition in 2023—along with a significant section of the nominally “left” Socialist Campaign Group—due to his support for NATO’s war in Ukraine, and insistence that Britain upped arms supplies to the Zelensky regime.

McDonnell’s jingoism over Ukraine is no obstacle to his joining other Stop the War Coalition leaders at the front of their march, beneath the organisation’s banner, because the first priority is to promote the Labour “left”, even when its representatives back Starmer’s war drive.



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