

Hundreds of thousands protest in London to oppose Israel's ethnic cleansing in Gaza

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18 May 2025

Hundreds of thousands demonstrated in London on Saturday in an outpouring of opposition at Israel's intensifying genocide in Gaza. Organisers put the attendance at over 500,000 people.

Setting off from the Embankment, the march crossed Westminster Bridge, adjacent to Parliament, and Waterloo Bridge before arriving on Whitehall where a rally was held near Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Downing Street residence.

The march, the 27th held in London since Israel's genocide began 19 months ago in October 2023, was one of the largest yet. It was held during the week marking the 77th anniversary of the Nakba—the brutal ethnic cleansing of three quarters of a million Palestinians from the newly declared State of Israel.

Tens of thousands also attended a protest on Saturday in Paris.

The demonstrations took place following the announcement earlier this month that Israel would launch a full military occupation of the entire Gaza Strip and impose the mass internment of the population in concentration camps under armed guard, as a prelude to forced marches through the desert or deportation by sea. This is backed by US President Donald Trump, who concluded his Middle East tour in Qatar Thursday by reiterating his administration's plan to annex the Gaza Strip.

Hundreds of Palestinians have been killed by the Israel Defence Forces in the last week.

The London protests have demonstrated the gulf between the sentiment of those who attend and the politics of the march organisers, who insist that the only way forward is to make moral appeals to the political establishment to end their complicity with genocide and break ties with the Israeli state.

On Saturday, the Stop the War Coalition and

Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) made great play of the "breakthrough" achieved the previous day at the Annual General Meeting of the Co-Op supermarket chain, where a motion was passed to "cease all trading with Israel."

Speakers on the platform said this meant that everyone had to work to ensure that the policy became the policy of all the supermarket chains and other high street stores. However, even in its X thread announcing this as "a big victory for our movement," the PSC had to note that "The Co-Op board has said the motion is merely 'advisory'."

Also cited were editorials in leading newspapers, including the *Financial Times*, calling for a negotiated end to Israel's war on Gaza, as evidence that "the cracks are showing" as "British complicity in Israel's genocide is slowly but surely being ended."

Stop the War Convenor Lindsey German—of the pseudo-left Counterfire group—told the rally, "Now it's clear, even to some of the people who supported Israel, how absolutely appalling Netanyahu's treatment [of the Palestinians] is. So we've even had Tory MPs, we've even had people from the Board of Deputies [of British Jews], we've even had the Spanish prime minister, and we've even had backbench Labour MPs acknowledging that Israel has gone much, much further than they expected them to do."

She ended with an appeal to the political criminals in Downing Street and the White House to stop backing Israel, declaring: "We say to Keir Starmer and Donald Trump, you can't supply food for the starving children of Gaza but you can supply bombs every single day. You can supply F-35s. Enough of this. Stop arming Israel. Solidarity with the Palestinian people."

What is being concealed by German is that Starmer acts with the unchallenged authority of the Labour

government in backing genocide, alongside Trump.

The overwhelming majority of Labour's 400-plus MPs remain *rock solid* behind the genocide. Several speakers alluded to new research showing that just in four months (from September-December 2024), more military equipment was licensed for export to Israel under Labour than the previous Tory government approved in four years (2020-2023).

This week, Starmer government lawyers even argued in the High Court that no genocide is taking place in Gaza, in opposition to a legal challenge to the UK continuing to sell F-35 fighter parts and components that are used by Israel in Gaza.

Moreover, the fact that there is no real backbench revolt of Labour MPs was underscored by the absence of any current Labour MP on Saturday's platform.

MP Apsana Begum currently sits as an Independent in Parliament, almost 10 months after having the Labour whip withdrawn and being suspended from the party for voting against the Starmer government's policy to retain the punitive two-child benefit cap. The main criticism of the government made by Begum in her speech—without naming Starmer—was that its actions had done “tremendous damage” to “the UK's reputation abroad”.

The only other MP speaking was former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, now also an Independent. He has not had the Labour whip for four-and-a-half years, since November 2020, and was expelled from the party prior to last July's general election.

Corbyn said he welcomed the statement, “which is a great improvement on what's gone on before,” from Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia, Spain and Norway. The statement of these European Union countries said no more than they “will not be silent in front of the man-made humanitarian catastrophe that is taking place before our eyes in Gaza.” But Corbyn nevertheless pleaded, “we demand our government here does the same.”

Instead of calling for opposition to Starmer's government of war and austerity, he announced yet another parliamentary manoeuvre, his plan to move “a private member's bill in parliament to call for an independent public inquiry into all aspects of the policy in relation to arms supplies, recognition and the desperate humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people.”

The diversion of mass protests in London into the dead end of appeals to the ruling elite and its institutions has gone on for months and has alienated many of those who attend. In the words of one protester who spoke to the Socialist Equality Party at our stall on Whitehall: “We come to the rallies regularly, but we don't stop to listen to the speeches any more as it's always the same words and nothing ever changes.”

The Socialist Equality Party, British section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, fights to unite the working class internationally against genocide and world war, linking this to the fight against austerity and the evisceration of democratic rights.

At Saturday's protest, members of the SEP and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality distributed thousands of copies of a leaflet calling for attendance at a public meeting in London on May 31, “Trump's war on free speech: The case of Momodou Taal.”

Momodou is a British-Gambian dual citizen, whose student visa was revoked while completing his PhD at Cornell University leaving him facing imprisonment and deportation. His visa was revoked after he filed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Trump's executive orders criminalising protest against Israel's assault on Gaza. At the end of March, Taal took the decision to leave the US after concluding that the courts offered no protection against his arrest and deportation.

His case raises all the central issues facing workers and young people internationally in confronting the genocide in Gaza and opposing the turn to dictatorial forms of rule at home by imperialists powers.

After Saturday's demonstration, SEP Assistant National Secretary Thomas Scripps spoke to the WSWS about its significance, and the party's upcoming public meeting on May 31: “Trump's war on free speech: The case of Momodou Taal”.

Buy your meeting ticket at Eventbrite.

On Monday, the WSWS will run interviews with protesters in our continued coverage of Saturday's event.



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