

# Hundreds protest at Forged Solutions in Sheffield against supply of F-35 components to slaughter Palestinians

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18 June 2025

Over 500 protestors participated in a demonstration outside the Forged Solutions factory gates in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, England Tuesday.

Participants came from across South Yorkshire including, Doncaster, Rotherham, Wakefield, Chesterfield and on coaches from Leeds. There were also coaches and attendance from Coventry, Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham and Bradford.

There were many young people and a broad section of workers and nationalities including from the Middle East. The turnout was large for a rally held on a weekday morning, fuelled by anger against the genocide in Palestine and the escalating US-Israel war in Iran, both supported by the major European imperialist powers including the Starmer Labour government.

The demonstration was organised by organisations around the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, including Sheffield Palestine Coalition against Israeli Apartheid, and groups calling for the Divestment and Boycott of Israel. Forged Solutions, employing more than 600 workers, is part of BAE systems and produces component parts for the F-35 fighter jets, the most advanced and lethal fighter jet in the world. The UK supplies at least 15 percent of the components for the F-35 and is the only tier one supplier for the warplane via BAE.

The government's decision last September to suspend some arms export licenses to Israel following a review made an exception for F-35 fighter jet components. F-35's are used to drop 2,000 bombs on Gaza, including in designated "safe zones."

The action in Sheffield was one of three protests targeting the F-35 supply chain. The others were held at Lockheed Martin UK in Havant, Hampshire—the registered sender of seven shipments of F-35 components direct from Britain to Israel—and the BAE Systems site Rochester, Kent which produces the Active Interceptor System used by the pilot to control the fighter jet.

Forged Solutions had removed a large sign at the front of its factory linking it to BAE systems prior to the demonstration. The protest led to the closure of the main Meadowhall Road next to Forged Solutions.

Sheffield is a key location for military manufacturing investment under Labour's Strategic Defence Review (SDR) unveiled this month. Millions will be spent on developing existing manufacturing capacity and on opening new factories for military-based production in the city which was a centre of steelmaking for most of the 20th century.

On June 9, only days after launching the SDR, Defence Minister John Healey accompanied NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte—during his trip to see Starmer and prior to making a keynote speech in London—on a visit to the Sheffield Forgemasters plant. Sheffield Forgemasters employs 725 and manufactures specialist steel parts used in critical military programmes, including nuclear-grade steel components for the Royal Navy's attack submarines.

It was nationalised in a £2.6 million deal with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) in 2021 under the Johnson Conservative government. This year the MoD awarded BAE Systems a contract to deliver 150 British-designed artillery barrels to Ukraine, which will be fulfilled in partnership with Sheffield Forgemasters.

Three days later, Healey opened a new artillery factory in Tinsley, Sheffield to be run by BAE Systems. This is part of the government's SDR commitment to open six ammunition facilities.

An MoD statement noted, "The [Sheffield] facility covers 94,000 sq ft, making it significantly larger than the pitch at Wembley stadium, and will manufacture the only combat-proven 155mm lightweight howitzer in the world, the British M777." Production will begin later this year and has the "capacity to expand production lines. The site will evolve to develop and produce a range of world-class combat systems."

WSWS reporters distributed the article, "UK trade union leaders back Starmer government's war drive", explaining that there was another organisation complicit in the genocide—the trade union bureaucracy. The rally was held directly opposite the Unite union's regional office, with the overspill from the demonstration directly outside it.

General Secretary Sharon Graham has welcomed the SDR, only criticising the government for not going far enough with military spending.

Unite is bitterly hostile to any action by workers that would cut across its long-established corporatist relations—alongside the GMB and Prospect unions—with BAE Systems. Last year, as Israel's destruction of Gaza intensified, and Britain stepped up its backing for NATO's war on Russia, Graham denounced actions "that actively work against our members and their jobs... groups that look to build networks inside trade unions to undermine the defence industry or demand the disbandment of NATO and AUKUS [the Australian, British and US military alliance against China].

Many participants at the Sheffield protest took the WSWS leaflet, giving comments on why they were attending the demonstration as well as speaking out on broader issues around war, and the weekend's mass protests against Trump administration in the US under the "No Kings" slogan.

**Trevor** travelled to the protest from Nottingham. He said, "We're here today because we believe that Forged Solutions, which is the factory behind us, make parts that are in Israeli F-35 fighter jets.

"Those fighters are part of the continuing war against the innocent Palestinians and the attempt to eradicate them.

"It's quite shameful that the trade unions here haven't done anything to stop the weapons supply to Israel. Here in Britain, if you write to your MP, all you get back is that Israel "has a right to defend itself."

"But that doesn't give Israel the right to destroy an entire people, which is what they're doing and which Britain is complicit in by providing parts

and investing in them. I don't believe that the people of Britain want to be complicit in the genocide that's going on, in Palestine. At least not all of them."

Retired engineer **Patrick** said, "I've come here today from Peterborough because I'm completely opposed to what is happening. Not only in Gaza, but also what's happening in Iran."

"They are not two separate things. Israel now thinks it's the policeman of the world, whether it's Lebanon or Syria. And now Iran. Where is next?"

"What is happening in Gaza is genocide. Whatever those ministers in government say, with their wishy-washy nonsense about Israel's right to defend themselves, it's genocide that is being committed and it should be called that."

"They say it's a question of Israel's right to defend itself, so Palestinians don't have a right to defend themselves? There's no right for the Lebanese to defend themselves?"

"When union leaders like Unite's Sharon Graham say more defence spending is good for jobs they're not thinking about people's lives [in Gaza]. All they think about is making sure the industries carry on producing all these things and they keep getting their members subs payments. I think that's the bottom line for a lot of them."

**Davinder**, a biologist from Wolverhampton, said, "I've come because I'm shocked and saddened to see the complicity of our government, of our leaders and institutions in what is happening in Gaza."

"They're not taking any action. I just can't bear to see the children being dismembered by the bombs, and now it's a famine that has been completely manufactured."

"Now with the bombing of Iran, the Israeli government hasn't really made a secret of the greater Israel plan. So they're just going ahead with it. But it is the US and the Western countries that are the instigators, not Iran. The UK are also standing behind the US and backing Israel. It's indiscriminate bombings, all over the Middle East. We've seen the actions of Israel. It is the one that has instigated everything."

Talking about the Filton 18 in Bristol, who face the prospect of terrorism charges for their protest, **Davinder** said, "They took action because our government has failed. It is our government that is complicit in genocide, what they're doing is illegal. So this is why people are taking action like the Filton 18."

"I don't think it's right that they should be labelled as terrorists. They are using the law to oppress people, and further real terrorism, that is state terrorism."

"I'm shocked and it's deeply depressing that the trade unions here have not done anything to stop arms going to Israel."

**Aminah** said, "I'm from Newcastle and we've got a big movement there opposing the Gaza genocide."

"We also have an Israeli state-owned factory in our city and we want to build connections and unify the struggle in the UK because we don't want the arms trade to have anything to do with the genocide. We don't believe there should be any armed trade in this country at all because it's a colonial imperial entity."

"I'm in total solidarity with the Filton 18 and all political prisoners, from Palestine to the UK. We are seeing the use of really draconian laws and the abuse of power. There's so many who have been involved in direct action that are in prison on remand, and there are even people who haven't taken direct action who are being charged with criminal damage for putting stickers on items in supermarkets. It's absolutely ridiculous."

"I'm a huge believer in international solidarity and the trade unions here should have heeded that call for solidarity from the Palestinian trade unions from day one."

"I'm a member of the Industrial Workers of the World and my union fully supports taking down the arms trade and uniting with workers to put down their tools and think about our shared humanity. We've got more in

common with the workers in Palestine than we have in common with the big wigs that are profiting off the genocide. I think that trade unionists should be working to take more powerful action, put down your tools, and work together."

Retired National Health Service worker **Alma**, who travelled from Liverpool, said, "The leader of Unite, Sharon Graham, is terrible for allowing arms production for Israel to continue. The union could tell the workers to just put the components aside and continue with everything else. Just leave the ones that go into the F-35 jets."

"Unite should also disaffiliate from the Labour Party, I'm ashamed of them and have left, even though I had been a member all my life. Absolute shame on them. 20,000 dead children so far and counting. There's more under the rubble and some 36,000 orphans."

**James** said, "I'm here to protest against the building of F-35 parts by Forged Solutions in Sheffield. We shouldn't be a part of this genocide, I want to be part of being against that."

"I think the role of the Labour government is disgusting. Sir Keir Starmer was a human rights lawyer before he was a politician. Now Labour is completely complicit. They have the power to divest the money they're spending on Israel into things that are actually needed, for example the cost-of-living crisis right now. What's the difference now between Labour and Tory?"

In response to a WSWS reporter, James said, "I didn't know that the Palestinian trade unions had called on the unions around the world to take practical action to halt the genocide. The fact none have is quite disappointing, really."

"I would totally support workers forming rank-and-file committees to take such matters into their own hands."

**Eddie** said, "I came here today from Leeds where I've been involved with protesting against the genocide for a while. I think now more than ever, it's important to come out and protest and show your face at events like these because of what's been going on recently. You know, with the Freedom Flotilla, and the world falling into disarray. The people need to stop it."

"Israel's bombing of Iran is just an extension of Western colonialism, isn't it? It's Israel being a plaything of America, just doing their bidding."

"The Labour government have been cowards. It's a bastardisation of Labour. They shouldn't be called Labour. They started as a left-wing party and now they're capitalist freaks."

"It is the UK and America and the western world that is committing a genocide in Palestine."



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