

Mass protest in London against genocide in Gaza, war on Iran offered nothing but pressuring Starmer

Robert Stevens
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Hundreds of thousands protested in London on Saturday to oppose the genocide in Gaza and the war on Iran. Organisers put the attendance at over 350,000 people, despite stifling hot weather.

The demonstration began at Russell Square and marched through central London via the Strand to Whitehall, the seat of the Labour government. It took place two days after US President Donald Trump announced he would decide “within the next two weeks” whether US forces would bomb Iran, and less than a day before they did so.

Organisers in the Palestine Coalition—primarily the Stop the War Coalition and Palestine Solidarity Campaign—again directed the determination of those attending into dead-end demands that the warmonger and genocide apologist in chief Prime Minister Keir Starmer pursue a peace policy.

For 20 months and across almost 30 national demonstrations collectively mobilising millions, this strategy has not only failed to stop British imperialism facilitating the Gaza genocide but has done nothing to stop Israel and its imperialist backers from extending the war to Iran.

Given the overwhelmingly pro-war character of Starmer’s party, the organisers of the London marches have been able to call on only a handful of Labour MPs prepared to mount the platform of an anti-genocide protest.

These were Apsana Begum, Zarah Sultana, Bell Ribeiro-Addy, Richard Burgon, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott. However, only on a few occasions did these individuals speak as sitting Labour MPs. Begum, Sultana, Burgon and McDonnell, and three other Labourites, had the whip removed almost a year ago for

voting for a Scottish National Party amendment opposing the Labour government retaining the Conservatives’ punitive two child welfare benefit cap.

The MP who has spoken most frequently at the rallies is former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, expelled as a Labour MP in November 2020 and finally booted out of the party altogether prior to the last July’s general election.

None of them have gone beyond denunciations of Starmer, and frequently only of the tamest character—Corbyn in particular specialises in never actually naming the person he is criticising. Their words were carefully chosen to restrict the outlook of the protest movement to placing pressure on Starmer, Trump and Netanyahu to end the wars.

Since Abbott and Burgon have had the whip restored by Starmer, on pain of best behavior, and while McDonnell pleads for the same, they have not spoken at a national demonstration in months. The only MPs besides Corbyn who now speak with any regularity are Begum and Sultana, having likely concluded their time as Labour MPs is over anyway—though neither has resigned from the party.

With virtually no MPs left prepared to mount an anti-war platform, Saturday’s rally saw organisers call on SNP Scottish Parliament member Humza Yousaf. Yousaf, the former First Minister of Scotland and leader of the SNP, resigned from his post in April last year after only 13 months in power, collapsing his coalition agreement with the Scottish Greens.

While one of the Stop the War officers on the platform got up a chant of “Keir Starmer you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide”, Hamza made clear that this wasn’t his agenda. Instead, he argued, Starmer

should be the one organising for Netanyahu to be brought before the International Court of Justice at The Hague!

“Let’s say clearly to Keir Starmer, end your complicity. Stop selling arms to Israel. Stop supporting a genocide. Sanction Israel. Recognise the Palestinian state. And for God’s sake, for God’s sake, before he can kill any more innocent people, get Netanyahu in The Hague, get him in a jail cell where he can be for the rest of his days.”

Speaking on behalf of Stop the War, Chris Nineham of the pseudo-left Counterfire group described his belief in a better world free of hunger and war, while making no mention of the Starmer government or the need for the working class to break politically with the Labour Party and its backers in the trade union bureaucracy.

After almost two years of demonstrations which have achieved nothing in stopping the genocide, Corbyn called for months more, if required, of the same. “We’re here in Whitehall on Midsummer’s Day in solidarity with the people of Palestine. And we’ll be here on Midwinter’s Day or any other day of the year that’s necessary for the support of Palestinian people.”

Describing “a perilous and terrible moment in world history, where one war after another appears to be on the brink,” Corbyn appealed for Starmer, Trump and other Western leaders to come to their senses—for imperialist politicians to not act like imperialist politicians.

Still never mentioning the name of the prime minister living in Downing Street just yards away from where he was speaking, Corbyn coupled his opposition to the bombing and occupation of Gaza and the West Bank and the destruction of Iran with the plea that “all of our political leaders ought to be bending every fibre of their body to bring about peace and bring about justice by halting arms sales and arms supplies, by halting the security arrangements with Israel, by ending the use of RAF [Royal Air Force] Akrotiri. All those things are quite possible.”

This utterly bankrupt perspective took even less time to be shattered in the case of Iran than the same appeals over Gaza. As soon as the US began bombing, Starmer’s government—and the other European governments—gave their full backing.

Starmer said on Sunday morning, under conditions in

which everyone knows that Iran possesses no nuclear weapons, “Iran’s nuclear programme is a grave threat to international security. Iran can never be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon and the US has taken action to alleviate that threat.”

Speaking to the BBC, business secretary, Jonathan Reynolds repeated Starmer’s endorsement, while adding the lie that the Iranians had blocked negotiations. “We had proposed a diplomatic course of action, as other European countries had done; the Iranians had rejected that. I wanted a different way to obtain this, but I cannot pretend to you that the prevention of Iran having a nuclear weapon is anything other than [in] the interests of this country.”

The Socialist Equality Party attended the London demonstration to distribute and discuss its June 17 statement, “Oppose Starmer’s plans for war against Iran!”, which calls for the “broadest industrial and political mobilisation of the working class to stop Keir Starmer’s Labour government dragging Britain into war”.

It warns that “For almost two years, mass demonstrations have been told that the Gaza genocide can be ended by placing pressure on Labour and other imperialist governments to end support for Israel.”

Now, “Starmer and Trump are dragging humanity towards a potentially catastrophic war, yet Corbyn still offers nothing but moral appeals to war criminals...

“Genocide and war can only be defeated through the independent political mobilisation of the working class in a global anti-war movement on socialist foundations. It is the international working class, the most powerful social force on earth, and not Tehran, Moscow or Beijing, that must defeat the drive of the imperialist powers to redivide the world between them.”



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