

At London march against Gaza genocide, leaders offer Labour's token sanctions as way forward

Our reporters
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A march estimated by organizers at 250,000 people was held in central London on Saturday, as part of a Global Day of Action against Israel's genocide in Gaza. The protests marked three years since Israel launched its onslaught, which has killed more than 74,000 Palestinians, with thousands more dead under the rubble and virtually the entire population of 2 million displaced.

The London demonstration was the 37th national march in three years. It filled the route from Victoria Embankment to Whitehall—where a rally was held outside Downing Street.

More than 300 events were held in 60 countries across six continents. At least 176 took place in Europe.

Thousands protested in Paris, including many students who have been demonstrating for weeks against the attacks of President Emmanuel Macron's government. In Dublin, around 10,000 people joined Ireland's 21st national demonstration. Thousands marched to the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in Edinburgh. In Italy, protests took place in around 50 cities, including Rome, Naples and Turin. Demonstrators also marched in Istanbul, Berlin, Zurich and Warsaw and Athens.

Police imposed conditions on the London march under the Public Order Act 1986, including no deviation from the route specified. A Section 60AA order was authorised under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, allowing any uniformed officer to require people to remove face coverings. The designated zone stretched from Holborn to Victoria and from Hyde Park Corner to Southwark. It covered roughly 2.5 square miles.

Police made 20 arrests. Six were arrested on suspicion of criminal damage after climbing the Battle of Britain memorial. Seven were arrested for breach of conditions, including two who allegedly refused to remove face coverings when instructed to do so by officers using Public Order Act powers. Two were detained for carrying placards supporting the proscribed Palestine Action group.

The Revolutionary Communist Party said at least 11 of its members were detained after they protested the police pulling one from their contingent, accusing him of wearing a face covering.

Organisers the Palestine Coalition—led by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Stop the War Coalition and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament—again insisted that the purpose of the latest mass protests was only to pressure governments into abandoning their support for Israel's genocide. Saturday's demands were "Stop Arming Israel" and "Sanctions Now."

From the platform in Whitehall, speakers hailed as a victory Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband's declaration at Labour's conference that the Palestine movement had been "right", accompanying a handful of token sanctions on Israel's West Bank settlements. Speakers claimed this was the product of three years of pressure from the streets, which now had to be stepped up against Labour Prime Minister Andy Burnham.

Your Party leader Jeremy Corbyn said Miliband's statement "was very small but it was a change. He admitted that it had only come about because of our demonstrations, our marches and our activity." Corbyn added that "Ed went on in his statement to say that the British government insisted that all countries abide by international law" and pleaded "so it's time for the British government to accept that genocide is taking place."

John McDonnell, the only MP who spoke from the Labour Party's 404 MPs, declared, "now we have Ed Miliband telling us we were right." But his "words have to be followed by actions."

Stop the War convenor Lindsey German said of Miliband's statement, "If we were right, why not stop arming Israel... Why not release all the prisoners, here as well as in Palestine, and why not drop all the charges against our own leaders here in the Palestine movement, and against all of those protesting in support of Palestine Action?"

Another Stop the War leader, Chris Nineham, insisted, "there is no way this movement would have won even the limited concessions and even the admissions we have got from the government if we hadn't been in the streets month after month, year after year."

Andrea Egan, general secretary of the UNISON trade union, said, "Mass protests work, campaigning works, huge democratic pressure works, but we need to keep going. The

government must go further.”

Last week a second victory was being proclaimed—the adoption of a motion at the Green Party’s conference declaring that “Zionism is racism.” But this was almost wholly sidelined on Saturday.

A ferocious right-wing campaign has been launched against the Greens and their leader Zack Polanski, denouncing them as “antisemitic”. Polanski went into rapid retreat, promising organizational changes to ensure leadership control over the party. After also failing to win against Labour in Thursday’s Holborn and St Pancreas by-election, he exempted himself from Saturday’s platform.

Underscoring the dead-end perspective advanced from the stage was the video statement sent to the march by Yanis Varoufakis. The former Syriza (Coalition of the Radical Left) finance minister was, along with Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, co-author of the betrayal of the mass movement of the Greek working class against austerity in 2015.

Faced with the wholesale destruction of Gaza, Varoufakis decided he could not claim a victory—unlike his co-thinkers.

“I’m not going to finish this message of solidarity by caressing your ears”, he said. “I am going to do the opposite. ... I am going to suggest that we stop congratulating ourselves. So far, we have failed. The genocide, the ethnic cleansing, the whitewashing of this century’s greatest crime is continuing despite our great efforts.”

“Our governments remain utterly complicit, even when they do some window dressing,” he said, dismissing Burnham’s sanctions on exports from the occupied territories as “pitiful, tokenistic gestures.” “What Andy Burnham has done was to take the wind out of our sails by lulling the majority into a false feeling that there has been a change in government policy vis-à-vis Israel. There hasn’t been one.”

“Wherever we look, if we are honest,” Varoufakis said, “we see the evidence of our movement’s failure to dent Israel’s determination to complete its genocide.”

Having made this more realistic assessment, however, Varoufakis also urged more activity based on the same failed perspective. “I know, I know, many of you are tired after years of campaigning, often at a very high personal cost. But now is not the time to feel the fatigue. Now is the time to do more, to do better.”

What unites every speaker at Saturday’s rally is their opposition to the only perspective that can genuinely end the genocide, a political struggle by the working class against the Burnham government and its counterparts within all the major imperialist powers, as part of a new socialist movement against war.

Opposition to Israel’s genocide must be united with opposition to the expanding war agenda of the imperialist powers, above all NATO’s war against Russia in Ukraine. That war once again went unmentioned by Varoufakis and the other speakers, other than an oblique warning that Europe’s

governments “are trying to bring much bigger wars into Europe itself”.

Nor did speakers address the fact that Burnham’s Labour government, which the STWC has supposedly shifted to the left, is leading the charge against Russia and still backs Israel for good measure.

Socialist Equality Party members distributed copies of the September 30 WSWs Editorial Board statement, “Is the world on the brink of nuclear war?”

The statement warns that the US-NATO war against Russia is escalating towards a confrontation between nuclear-armed powers and calls on workers to oppose the war and rearmament. SEP members also distributed hundreds of leaflets demanding the release of Bogdan Syrotyuk, a Ukrainian socialist and opponent of the war, who was sentenced on August 10 to 15 years in prison on charges of “high treason.”

Theatre worker Jose took a leaflet at the demonstration and later sent a message to the SEP giving his support for the campaign. He said, “I stand with the people that fight against militarism, imperialism and fascism, and seek peace based in justice and dignity for everyone, with full respect of the human rights enshrined in the United Nations.

“I have learnt recently about Bogdan. It appears to me that he has been charged without proper due process, applying what looks like martial law rather than civil law. In a democracy, he should be able to express his opinion without fear, even during a war.

“I do understand Ukraine is in a perilous situation, but this is no justification to imprison a citizen just because he disagrees with the official line. I hear reports that his health has deteriorated, and the prisons are in a bad state. This makes me deeply worried about his well being. I ask the relevant authorities in the EU [European Union] and the UK to demand a review of Bogdan’s case and remind the Ukrainian government of its responsibility towards the Bogdan’s life.”



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