Netherlands: Over 200,000 join fourth Red Line demonstration in Amsterdam against Gaza genocide and rearmament

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More than 200,000 people marched through Amsterdam Sunday, November 8, in the fourth nationwide Red Line (Rode Lijn) demonstration, according to estimates by the organizers. The protesters, a majority of them dressed in red, demanded an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza.

While the official platform confined itself to appeals to the Jetten government to end its military and economic ties with Israel, the mood among demonstrators has shifted markedly since the first Red Line march in May 2025. Many now understand the genocide as the outcome of deliberate government policy, bound up with the drive across Europe and internationally toward rearmament and war.

Held under the slogan "Beyond the Red Line – No money for genocide", the march was called by 13 organizations, including Amnesty International, Oxfam Novib, PAX, Save the Children and The Rights Forum.

The demonstration brought together broad sections of the working class and youth from across the Netherlands, from toddlers in prams to elderly people in wheelchairs. Amsterdam, home to some 950,000 people of around 180 nationalities, is one of Europe's most diverse cities. The protest in its form and essence had an international character, uniting workers, young people and families from different national backgrounds and generations in opposition to the genocide of the Palestinian people and the policies of the ruling Jetten government.

The procession was so large that it filled almost the entire route, a loop from Museumplein, the square in front of the Rijksmuseum and Van Gogh Museum, through the west and south of the city and back.

Among the marchers was *Witnesses of Gaza*, a citizens' initiative from Amsterdam and Utrecht inspired by similar formations in Italy. Its members carried a memorial cloth 6 meters wide and 36 meters long, on which they had inscribed by hand the names of 21,637 Palestinian children killed by the Israeli military between October 7, 2023, and May 7, 2026, arranged by age. Carried through the streets, the cloth set the names of the dead children against the anonymity of official casualty figures.

The first and second Red Line demonstrations, on May 18 and June 15, 2025, drew some 100,000 and 150,000 people to the Malieveld in The Hague. The third, in Amsterdam on October 5, 2025, brought an estimated 250,000 onto the streets, one of the largest mass protests in the Netherlands in decades.

The official slogans have changed with each successive demonstration. The first two marches were directed against the Schoof government, led by Geert Wilders' far-right Party for Freedom (PVV) after its 2023 election victory, and called on the cabinet to "draw a red line" against Israel. The October 2025 march, held days after Israel's seizure of the Global Sumud Flotilla and weeks before the national election, demanded that the government stop the genocide. This year's march was held under the slogan "Beyond the Red Line," an acknowledgment by the organizers themselves that the line they had asked successive governments to draw has long been crossed.

It has been crossed with impunity, in defiance of both international courts in The Hague, barely 60 kilometers from Amsterdam: the International Court of Justice, which in January 2024 ordered Israel to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza, and the International Criminal Court, which in November 2024 issued an arrest warrant for Benjamin Netanyahu.

After mass demonstrations throughout the world, the genocide continues . Hundreds of thousands of displaced families face another winter without adequate shelter, and over the same weekend heavy rains flooded some 70,000 tents. According to official figures, Israel's onslaught has killed more than 74,000 Palestinians, among them 21,000 children, since October 2023.

It is to the Jetten government, a government of war and austerity, that the organizers address their appeals. In October 2025, weeks before the election that brought his Democrats 66 (D66) to power, Rob Jetten joined the Red Line demonstration in a red shirt and spoke out against the genocide. Today, as prime minister, he heads a minority coalition with the right-wing People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) that maintains military and economic ties with Israel.

Dutch military spending has risen from about €22 billion in 2025 to €26.9 billion in 2026, with €28.9 billion planned for 2027, in line with NATO's 2025 commitment to raise defense and security-related spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035. To pay for it, the cabinet drew up €6.8 billion a year in cuts to unemployment, disability and pension benefits, along with a "Freedom Contribution," a war levy on wages.

Faced with strikes by transport, port, public sector and hospital workers, the cabinet turned to the trade unions. In September, it shelved its cuts to unemployment and disability benefits, and the unions called off the strikes and reopened talks on "savings." Lacking a parliamentary majority, the cabinet is bargaining with opposition parties to pass its budget in a vote on November 12.

Part of a broader European movement

The Amsterdam march, the first national mobilization of its kind in the Netherlands in more than a year, came at the end of a week of struggles across Europe. On October 30, dockworkers at at least 113 ports in 22

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countries struck and demonstrated against war, genocide and militarization. The following day, more than 120,000 young people protested in over 30 German cities against the crumbling education system, social cuts and war spending. On November 5, a one-day public sector strike hit France amid mass student and "yellow vest" protests, while in Spain mass strikes are building toward a nationwide stoppage on November 11.

In the Netherlands, the unions have worked to contain this movement. They kept their members out of the October 30 international dockworkers' strike, even though Rotterdam is Europe's largest port, confining them to token national stoppages such as the June 24 transport strike and the nearly eight-hour port strike in September.

The fourth Red Line demonstration therefore raised a fundamental political question: Why have repeated protests involving hundreds of thousands of people not produced the changes demanded by their participants?

The organisers' programme, with speeches by Gaza journalist Amal Helles, former Dutch minister Lilianne Ploumen, BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti and writer Benjamin Moser, was again confined to appeals to the government.

Many participants articulated political questions with greater clarity and depth than those addressed from the platform. In interviews with the *World Socialist Web Site*, demonstrators went beyond demands for sanctions against Israel, raising broader questions about the growth of militarism, social inequality, imperialist war and austerity, and the need for decent living and working conditions. Their remarks revealed a search for political answers extending beyond appeals to the very government whose policies they had gathered to oppose.

WSWS reporters distributed copies of the article "Netherlands: Jetten's war cabinet is working with the trade unions to cut social welfare" and the statement of the Socialist Equality Parties in Europe, "Support the international dockworkers' action! Build a European general strike against war and austerity!" They held numerous discussions with demonstrators on the political perspective needed to fight war and genocide.

"Workers need to take to the streets

Arjan Lamers, a 35 year old worker, who had attended two previous Red Line demonstrations, said that he had come to Amsterdam from Venlo to demonstrate that humanity had not been lost. "I want to speak out against genocide, because I couldn't look myself in the mirror if I did nothing at a time when genocide is taking place in the world. Whether that is in Palestine or Sudan makes no difference. Genocide must never be regarded as normal."

He wanted to make the opposition of ordinary people in the Netherlands heard as strongly as possible, insisting that such violence must never become accepted as normal anywhere in the world.

He drew attention to the relationship between war, the arms industry and the political establishment. "An enormous amount of money is being directed towards defence and the arms trade, and towards getting arms production moving," he said.

Reflecting on the successive mass demonstrations, he continued: "Now here are 100,000, 150,000, 200,000 – I don't know how many people are here today – but the movement is growing. Meanwhile, defence spending is also increasing."

Arjan criticised the language used to justify expanding military budgets. "People think about 'defence'; they don't think about war. But most of the budget goes towards war. And we oppose war. We oppose genocide."

He argued that the working class needed to become politically active. "I think the central issue is that workers need to take to the streets."

He stressed the importance of political education and understanding the wider historical causes of war. "People have no idea what genocide actually is, or the broader ideas of imperialism – what it has done around the world, and how it has created the conditions that force so many refugees to flee to other countries."

"Ultimately, you're looking for hope"

Annemarie, who travelled from Utrecht with her friend Ronja to take part in the demonstration, described the emotional and political pressures that had brought her to Amsterdam. "I realise that my main reason for being here is for myself – and, saying that out loud – but I feel a real need to be here with people who clearly think along the same lines and share the same values, in a world where you can sometimes lose hope.

"You think: there are so many things I'm worried about, so much is happening – why isn't everyone angry? Why isn't everyone lying awake over this? Why aren't we all taking to the streets?"

Ronja, joined in the conversation, expressed a similar sentiment. "It's wonderful to march here and feel that there are so many other people who are angry and perhaps feel powerless too, and who are trying to regain some measure of power in this way. For me, it also creates a strong sense of connection. You realise: this isn't something you're doing alone."

"Chanting and holding up your banner isn't enough"

A group of young demonstrators from Amsterdam, attending their second Red Line protest, expressed more direct concerns about the limitations of the movement.

Leo explained that the previous demonstration had left him with contradictory feelings. "Last time, I left the Red Line demonstration pleased that so many people had turned up, but I still didn't leave feeling satisfied."

He questioned whether demonstrations alone could bring about meaningful political change. "I think chanting and holding up your banner can have a necessary effect, but it isn't enough. So I've been thinking about what the next step could be. If they won't listen to this, I can't really think what a better next step would be. That's what I'm struggling with."

He continued: "I don't want to leave with the same feeling – that I haven't really been able to achieve very much. But ultimately, that is how it feels. It's a bit disheartening. Yet not going isn't an option either. It feels more symbolic."

He stressed the necessity of mobilising wider sections of the population. "I think mobilising people really is the way forward. This is obviously a very large group, but it is still quite a particular section of society."

Another young participant emphasised the international significance of the protest. "I also think it sends an international signal. A protest of 200,000 people in a country as small as the Netherlands certainly sends a message that travels internationally."

The discussion turned to increasing military expenditure, the arms industry and the prospect of young people being drawn into future wars.

Dex condemned the financial interests associated with military expansion. "The fact that greed for money outweighs the desire to let people live safely, without committing war crimes – that buying weapons is considered more urgent – Is disgraceful."

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He was particularly concerned about the prospect of young people being recruited or conscripted into the armed forces. “More people should be angry that young people are being offered up as cannon fodder. We get a letter saying: ‘You can join the army. Fill in this questionnaire about whether you want to enlist.’ We’re the guinea pigs for all this. I don’t want that war. I’m speaking for everyone here. We don’t want to fight on the front line… Then some people say: ‘If we have to, we have to.’ But we don’t have to – that’s the whole point.”

Asked about the possibility of military conscription, Leo said: “I think a great many young people are strongly opposed to it. So yes, it is a concern, if conscription is introduced. I think a very large proportion wouldn’t want to join the army – certainly not to fight a war they don’t want.

He questioned whether the state could realistically imprison large numbers of young people who refused. “As for the prison sentences they threaten us with, that wouldn’t be possible anyway, because there are no spaces available in prisons for all of us. So where would they put all those young people if everyone refused?

“If young people realised that the reality is the complete opposite, perhaps there could be some kind of revolt, like those that have happened in Milan, Spain and elsewhere. I’m not calling for violence or anything like that. But mobilising young people is so necessary. Things can always be better. And they should be.”

Among the placards carried through Amsterdam was one bearing the question: “When is our February Strike?”

The self-made placard invoked the historic February Strike of February 25–26, 1941, when hundreds of thousands of Dutch workers, mobilised by the underground Communist Party, stopped work after the Nazi occupiers deported 425 Jewish men from Amsterdam. Beginning among the city’s tram workers and dockers, it grew into a general strike, spreading to factories, public services and towns such as Zaanstad and Utrecht before being brutally suppressed. It was the first, and only, mass strike in Nazi-occupied Europe against the persecution of the Jews.

Eighty-five years later, the placard’s appearance at the Red Line demonstration posed a powerful political question: When will solidarity with a persecuted population move beyond mass demonstrations and take the form of class struggle by the Dutch working class, as it did in February 1941, when workers brought occupied Amsterdam and beyond to a standstill?

For some, the demonstration offered solidarity and renewed hope. For many others, it exposed the limits of mass protest confined to appeals to the ruling class. This contradiction has run like a red thread through all four demonstrations, revealing a widening gulf between mass opposition to war and the policies of successive Dutch governments.

That gulf will widen. The young people who marched on Sunday face being drawn into Europe’s preparations for war with Russia, while workers are made to pay for rearmament through cuts to social spending. The governments that maintain military ties with Israel are the same governments preparing for new wars.

The question posed by the placard on Sunday is the decisive one. Opposition to genocide and war must be transformed into an independent political movement of the working class, in the Netherlands and across Europe, guided by an internationalist socialist perspective. That means preparing a Europe-wide general strike against genocide, war and austerity.



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