

Thousands of Israeli workers and youth demonstrate against Sharon's war

David Cohen, Chris Marsden
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Under the slogan “march against the war”, thousands of Israeli Jewish workers, students, youth and intellectuals marched on April 3 in the occupied territories. The march was the initiative of the “Ta’ayush” movement (Jewish-Arab Partnership), together with Israeli Women’s Groups and Physicians for Human Rights. The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) made repeated and vicious attacks on the protesters.

Doctor Neve Gordon, one of the initiators and a lecturer in the politics department at Ben-Gurion University in Beer-Sheva, told a *World Socialist Web Site* correspondent prior to the demonstration:

“What exactly is happening behind the Kalandia checkpoint? We don’t know. Friends report that in addition to the senseless killing, the widespread destruction, and the siege on Al-Mukataa and Yasser Arafat, the recognised Palestinian leader, the Ramallah government hospital as well as other clinics are in desperate need of medical supplies. Palestinian women’s groups have contacted us, relating that there is a huge shortage of basic foods... We must end the cycle of violence by putting an end to the occupation; only then will the horrific killing of civilians—Arabs and Jews—stop.” She explained that, “Trucks of food and medical supplies destined for the Palestinian Union of Medical Relief and women’s organisations will accompany the march.”

Yehudit Harel, a Gush Shalom/Peace Block member, described her experiences on the demonstration:

“There was a big crowd of determined peace activists—more than 50 buses and private cars, around 3,000 people, Jews and Arabs, men and women from all over the country, representing the Anti War Coalition of all the Peace Movements and Organisations...

“While waiting for the trucks to arrive, all of sudden

the border police, or whoever those uniform-wearing hooligans were, started to shoot tear gas right into the middle of the crowd. The gas was very strong and they shot many, many times. The smoke spread quickly in a heavy and concentrated form and people were choking. Me too. I couldn’t breathe at all. People started to run—some fell into the mud. I found refuge in one of the neighbouring Palestinian homes. The people there took care of me, soothed me and provided me with onion for later.

“After a while we gathered again and kept on standing and waiting and shouting slogans... I was standing close to the checkpoint in the first row—they started shooting again. This time the police came out and started chasing the fleeing crowd, pushing people brutally, making some of them stumble and fall into the mud and hitting them with their sticks. The crowd started to distance itself from the checkpoint but they came after us, shooting new waves of tear gas. I saw a woman faint and others were slightly injured.”

She added, “A few activists were arrested but they were released after a short interrogation. The authorities claim that this was a violent and provocative action is an absolute lie. There was no violence whatsoever and no stones were thrown at the police. Obviously, after being attacked we defied our attackers by shouting at them slogans like ‘Police State’, ‘Fascism will not win’, ‘Shame on you, you are a shame to Jewish people’, etc. Some activists shouted at them: ‘You behave like Nazis’, which made them ever more angry and vicious.”

Two days previously, nine foreign peace activists, amongst several hundred who have flown to Israel were injured while acting as “human shields” against IDF military action in the Palestinian territories. The nine—four Britons, two Americans, a Frenchman and an

Australian were shot at by Israeli soldiers—at a peace march near Bethlehem. Australian citizen Tracy Irving underwent surgery to remove shrapnel from her abdomen.

Chris Dunham, 31, a director of a London engineering consultancy, said, “I was carrying a banner saying ‘Resistance is not Terrorism’ and I was hit in the finger. My reaction was one of disbelief. We did not expect live rounds. Normally we face gas and rubber bullets.”

Kunle Ibidun, 30, a technology consultant living in Bristol, was injured in the elbow. “It was horrible. I have just found out my father died today so I will go back home. But I will come back. What I have seen here makes it impossible for me to turn my head away.”

The British comedian and writer Jeremy Hardy, told BBC Radio 4’s *Today* programme that soldiers then turned their fire on a group of reporters: “It was the most shocking brutality I’ve ever seen. There was absolutely no provocation from our side. It was very frightening.”

French anti-globalisation and farmers’ activist Jose Bove was assaulted and held along with several others at a detention centre prior to being deported. While in detention, he reported seeing “hundreds of men sitting on the ground, under canvas and behind barbed wire, surveyed by watchtowers. We saw 300 people kneeling down and blindfolded, waiting to be interrogated in the cold and the night. It was unbearable to behold.”

In total the Israeli army handed 11 French protesters to the police for deportation. Lt. Col. Olivier Rafovitch, an army spokesman, said of the detainees, “Peace activists is not the right word. We talk of provocateurs. They come from abroad to make trouble.”

Up to 12 Sussex University students are amongst those trapped by Israeli troops laying siege to the West Bank town of Ramallah. The activists issued an appeal for assistance, in which they explained, “We can hear explosions, tank shelling and heavy calibre gunfire throughout the night and day. Israeli snipers are shooting regularly in civilian neighbourhoods at times when they are not under any form of fire. As we write this, there are US-made Apache attack helicopters overhead firing on the city. Israeli bulldozers are creating permanent positions for the tanks in and around private houses...

“Israeli forces are taking Palestinians prisoner, in the streets and in house-to-house searches. Israeli troops are calling upon all male residents between the ages of 16 and 40 in some neighbourhoods to ‘surrender’. The wounded are being treated roughly and being denied medical access. Now, their fate is unknown. There are reports of summary execution of some prisoners.”

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of Israeli reservists and soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories. Most of them are being sentenced to 28-days imprisonment.

The Peace Block movement has published a message from Neta Golan, an Israeli leftist activist at Arafat’s besieged headquarters. A Peace Block (PB) member told the *World Socialist Web Site* that Neta Golan had said, “I and my friends—international peace activists from Italy, France, the US and other countries, some of them of Jewish origin—have come here to act as a human shield in case of any IDF attempt to break in. The government should know that among those determined to face the soldiers unarmed and bar their way is also an Israeli from Tel-Aviv.” The PB member added, “Neta Golan started to explain about members of the International Solidarity Group, located in Beit Jala, who marched today unarmed towards the Israeli tanks stationed there and were opened fire on... Then the call was abruptly cut off and could not be resumed, as happened on several previous occasions.”

The leftist poet Yitshak Leor has issued a public appeal, stating, “A huge military runs over a small people. Our sons and our brothers are carrying out mass arrests, terrifying young girls, humiliating their fathers, nurturing a new generation of suiciders, assuring the continuation of the conflict for generations to come. This occupation will kill us all... This war has no motivation except to control the Palestinians with the army and the settlers. This war brings no security. It drowns us all in rivers of blood and tears. We do not want a life of perpetual war. Let us organise a mass movement to accomplish what politicians have failed.”



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