

Germany: Protests demand immediate halt to Israeli war on Lebanon

Our correspondents**31 July 2006**

Demonstrations against the current Israeli attack on south Lebanon and Gaza took place Saturday in a number of German cities, including Berlin, Cologne and Frankfurt. In Berlin, an estimated 5,000 persons drawn mainly from Germany's Arab communities demonstrated through the middle of the city.

While a number of German human rights groups and antiwar organisations took part, the demonstration was notable for the absence of any of Germany's political parties with representation in parliament. The German government coalition of the Christian Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party is firmly supporting the Israeli-led and US-backed bombardment of Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, while opposition parties in the German parliament, such as the free-market Free Democratic Party and the Greens, have also lined up unconditionally behind Israel.

Also notable for its absence at the demonstration in Berlin was the Left Party—Party of Democratic Socialism, which purports to be a "left" opposition to the governing parties in Germany. Members of the Socialist Equality Party, which is running candidates in forthcoming state elections in the capital, spoke with demonstrators at the rally and handed out hundreds of copies of the statement: "Appeasement 2006: Europe capitulates to American-Israeli aggression."

Called by Arab organisations, the Berlin rally was attended by many young Germans of Arab origin and entire families outraged at the ruthless Israeli bombardment of civilians and ordinary families in Lebanon. In the course of discussions, it became clear that a number of those taking part in the rally had relatives and friends in southern Lebanon—some of whom had already fallen victim to the Israeli onslaught. Banners carried at the demonstration declared that US President Bush and the US were "Terrorist Number 1" and called for an immediate stop to the fighting. Other banners accused the German government of direct responsibility for the killing taking place in Lebanon.

WSWS reporters spoke to Dr. Muhaisen, a leader of the Palestinian community in Berlin and one of the main speakers at the rally. Muhaisen declared that the Israeli action was incomprehensible without US support: "Rice is touring the Middle East to block attempts to arrive at a peace deal. The real nature of her activities is shown by the fact that the American government is currently delivering high-tech bombs to the Israeli air force. Each bomb contains 2.3 tons of explosives, and they were transported last week via airports in Scotland. This is the real face of Israeli-US 'peacekeeping.' These munitions are being primarily used to terrorise ordinary civilians in the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon.

"Our latest figures indicate that over 600 civilians have been killed as a consequence of the bombing in southern Lebanon, and the majority of the casualties are women and children. There are now three quarters of a million people who have been forced to flee the region. All of this has not only been passively accepted and watched by the German government and Chancellor Angela Merkel. It has also played an active role to the extent that the German government supplies the Israeli army and air force with planes and weapons. In fact, Europe as a whole has proven to be very weak and has failed to use its veto

against the Americans."

When asked by WSWS reporters about the role of the Green Party and the fact that Joschka Fischer, former head of the Greens and former German foreign minister, was totally backing the Israeli offensive, Dr. Muhaisen replied: "I am very disappointed. I voted for the Greens at the last election, but now they will no longer receive my support. It is clear that this capitulation does not only apply to Fischer but the Greens as a whole. I am also disappointed in [Green Party Leader] Claudia Roth, who attended an anti-Iran demonstration a few weeks ago alongside some of the most right-wing, conservative politicians in Germany."

The WSWS also spoke with Mohammed, who lives in Berlin but has relatives in Beirut. "The entire area where my relatives live in Beirut has been severely bombed. Whole streets and housing blocks, including high-rise buildings, have been bombed to the ground. All of the destruction is aimed at civilians. The Israeli propaganda says that the area is dominated by the Hezbollah, but that is not true. There are a handful of offices in the district, but apart from that, it is an ordinary neighbourhood. Now, the Israelis have knocked out water and electricity supplies. To the extent that there is no or little fresh water, the danger grows of disease and infection."

When asked about the tactics of the Israeli army, Mohammed declared, "It is obvious that the bombing of the UN post and the killing of the four UN workers was a deliberate action. I have read that the Israeli army made contact with the post at 9:00 in the morning, so they knew the UN workers were there. A little while later, the post was bombed and wiped out. This is all part of the Israeli terror tactics. It goes hand in hand with the fact that they also deliberately bombed Red Cross vehicles that were transporting casualties of the previous bombings."

Zharah attended the rally with a group of young friends from Berlin. Still at school, Zharah reported how she had fled from the bombed areas of southern Lebanon just a few days previously. She had been visiting her family in southern Lebanon when the war erupted. She explained, "I directly experienced the terrifying bombardment. Our families gathered together with others in our small village as the bombing took place. Friends of mine and a number of neighbours of my family were hit during the course of the bombing. Everybody already knows somebody who has either died or been injured in our village.

"As the bombing continued, my parents were anxious that I should leave as soon as possible, and I left the village by car to travel over the mountains to Syria. Even

while trying to escape, I and the many other refugees were not safe. The roads were also bombed by the Israeli air force and I saw a number of fresh craters."

Zharah and her friends were quite clear that the United States was completely backing the Israeli aggression and that the devastation of southern Lebanon was part of a wider plan to go on an offensive against Syria and Iran and secure control over oil reserves in the regions.

In Frankfurt, between 600 and 800 protesters gathered in the middle of the city carrying banners and waving Lebanese and Palestinian flags. The protest had been called by the Peace Network cooperative and included speakers from various anti-war organisations, other political organisations and speakers from the Lebanese and Palestinian communities in Germany.

The protest was boycotted by the media and had not been publicised in any of the local press or television. A number of "Wanted: Terrorist" posters bearing the names of George W. Bush, Condoleezza Rice and Ehud Olmert were prominent, and slogans shouted at the rally included "Stop the war—immediately, war is terror, war is murder!" and "Stop the war, peace now!" Posters showed horrific pictures of dead and injured from the bombed area, listed the number of dead and attacked the media for failing to publicise the real extent of the calamity for ordinary families living in southern Lebanon.

Ibrahim carried a banner at the Frankfurt demonstration with the text "Europe and the Arab world, Why are you silent?" He expressed his anger over the inactivity of politicians to the WSWS: "They look on at what's happening but do nothing. The main thing now is to break the silence and raise our own voices." When asked about the text on his banner, he responded: "The stance of the European Union is completely hypocritical, because in negotiations they do not consider both sides of the conflict, but line up firmly with one side. When it comes down to it, the European Union is a plaything of the US, and that also unfortunately applies to Germany."



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