

Protests denounce Israeli assault on Gaza and Canadian government complicity

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Demonstrations were held in cities across Canada last Saturday to denounce the Israeli state's onslaught against the subjugated Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip.

The demonstrators voiced their outrage at the horrors—death, hunger, deprivation, and the threat of disease—that Israel is inflicting on the people of Gaza and at the complicity of Washington and Canada's Conservative government.

More than 10,000 people took to the streets of some 15 Canadian cities, including several thousand respectively in Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa and hundreds in other cities including Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Quebec City and Halifax.

Sid Ryan, president of the Ontario division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), told the approximately 4,000 protesters who had rallied outside the Israeli consulate in Toronto that Israel has committed war crimes and atrocities in Gaza. Ryan has been witch-hunted by the right-wing press for his trenchant criticisms of Israel.

Another speaker at the Toronto rally was a Holocaust survivor. She said that while some survivors shout "Never again for the Jews!", the watchword ought to be "Never again for humanity!"

Canadian Arab Federation representative Ali Mallah denounced remarks made by Conservative Environment Minister John Baird at a pro-Israel rally last Thursday. "John Baird was quoted as saying the resisters in Palestine are cowards," noted Mallah.

In Montreal, as many as 5,000 marched in bitterly cold weather to condemn Israel's assault on Gaza and the unconditional support that has been given it by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his government. A popular placard and chant was "Isræl terroriste; Harper-Bush complices" (Israeli terrorist; Harper-Bush accomplices).

The protestors in Montreal included workers and their families and students. Many of them were Arab Canadians. There were also supporters of several Jewish groups.

The demonstration was organized by the *Coalition élargie pour la paix et la justice en Palestine* (The Enlarged Coalition of Peace and Justice in Palestine), a coalition dominated by Quebec's major union federations (the QFL, CNTU and CSQ) and which includes a large number of other groups including *Québec solidaire*, a self-avowed left-sovereignist, (i.e., pro-Quebec independence) party.

While often denouncing in scathing terms US and Canadian government complicity in the Israeli attack on Gaza, the organizers of the Montreal protest, and those held elsewhere in Canada, advanced the perspective that imperialist war could be halted and the oppression of the Palestinian people overcome by placing pressure on the "international community," by which they mean the US, the European Union and other great powers, the Arab bourgeois governments, and imperialist-dominated institutions like the UN.

In opposition to this perspective, supporters of the Socialist Equality Party (Canada) distributed statements from the *World Socialist Web Site* that explained that the

only true ally of the Palestinian masses is the international working class and that the defeat of imperialism and Zionism requires the united mobilization of the working class of all countries, including Arab and Jewish workers, against capitalism.

Speaking to the Montreal protest, Confederation of National Trade Unions President Claudette Charbonneau urged the Canadian government to take advantage of Barack Obama's assumption of the US presidency to convince Washington to "play a less partisan role and to contribute to a just, durable peace." She added that Ottawa should not "hide behind the old policies of the Bush administration."

Amir Khadir, the co-leader of *Québec solidaire* and since last month its first and only Member of the Quebec National Assembly, joined other speakers in calling on the great powers to press for a ceasefire. Like Charbonneau, Khadir was scrupulous in equating the violence of the US-armed Israel Defence Forces and the actions of Hamas, condemning both equally. Declared Khadir, "The international community has responsibility to put an end to a conflict that is bruising the Palestinian people, but that is also holding the Israeli population hostage."

"Harper and Obama and the rest of the international community must," continued Khadir, "force Israel to sit down and negotiate with the Palestinians in good faith."

The reality is that the Harper Conservative government, the official opposition Liberals and the Canadian corporate media have all rallied behind Israel. This has included opposing a ceasefire until Israel has obtained all its objectives in Gaza, laying all blame for the conflict and for the large number of civilians killed by Israeli air strikes and artillery barrages on Hamas, and otherwise apologizing for Israeli war crimes.

Last Thursday, the new Liberal leader, Michael Ignatieff, reiterated his and his party's support for the Israeli assault on Gaza, denouncing Hamas, which won Palestinian Authority elections in 2006, as a "terrorist organization" and asserting Israel's right to kill scores of Palestinians daily until Hamas cedes to its demands.

That same day, Conservative ministers, including Baird and Peter Kent, the minister of state for foreign affairs, were out in force at pro-Israel rallies. Canada, Kent told a rally organized by Zionist organizations in Toronto, is

"unequivocal in supporting Israel's right to defend itself"—that is, in upholding Israel's "right" to pummel Gaza and inflict massive civilian casualties.

As for Obama, his silence on the Israeli assault denotes consent, a consent that is entirely in keeping with declarations he made during the US election campaign. Speaking before the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the principal pro-Israel lobby in Washington, the day after he clinched the Democratic Party presidential nomination, Obama vowed he would never negotiate with Hamas and other Islamic and nationalist groups that refuse to recognize the state of Israel. "Israel's security," Obama proclaimed, "is sacrosanct. It is non-negotiable."

Most of the demonstrators with whom SEP supporters spoke thought the protests would have little impact on Canadian and US state policy, but that it was important to voice their outrage at the crimes being visited upon the Palestinian people by the Israeli state with the support of Washington and Ottawa, with a view to promoting public awareness.

Mounim, a business administration student, said he had come to the protest, "so as to stop the massacre in Gaza. I have come so the population can learn the truth. The media tell us nothing about this conflict that has persisted for years, and when they do it is simply to show pictures of people in the streets protesting."

"All the governments of the world except that of [Venezuelan President] Chavez support Israel. It is for that reason there is no action against Israel. In any case, Israel won't respect the demands of the United Nations."

For more on the Canadian government's and establishment's role in backing the Israeli state's assault on Gaza see: Canada's government and opposition trumpet Israel's "right" to wage endless war in Gaza.



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