

Detroit: Hundreds rally against Israel atrocities

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On Thursday, hundreds of workers and youth demonstrated in downtown Detroit against Israel's ongoing attack on the Gaza Strip. The rally was the fourth called by the local Congress of Arab American Organizations (CAAO) in two weeks.

A team of Socialist Equality Party members spoke with demonstrators and distributed statements by the Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site, including "Israeli atrocities in Gaza: a political impasse and moral collapse," "Hands off Gaza!" and "The Gaza crisis and the perspective of permanent revolution."

Since December 27, Israel's IDF, armed to the teeth with among the world's most deadly military machines, has carried out a savage assault on the densely populated, and essentially defenseless, civilian area. Israel's impunity and brazenness, coupled with the war's one-sided character in which the ratio of Palestinians to Israelis killed is more than 70 to 1, has provoked revulsion throughout the world.

The war has served to once again expose Israel and its benefactor, the US, as the world's most dangerous bandit states. It has also exposed the complicity of the petty Arab dictators and political formations of the Middle East—both nationalist and Islamist—along with the European powers, and the United Nations, all of which, in one way or another, are committed to the oppression of the Arab masses.

What is posed by the events in Gaza is the need for an independent perspective, based on the unity of the working class throughout the Middle East and beyond. The demonstrations among workers and youth taking place in dozens of countries on every continent against Israel's butchery are a welcome step in this direction. But a resolution to the crisis gripping the Middle East

can only come through a conscious political struggle for international socialism.

The demonstration in Detroit, which numbered about 2,500 at its peak, was dominated by young Arab Americans, both workers and students. There were many Palestinian flags, and the crowd chanted "Free, Free, Palestine!" "Israeli is a terrorist state!" and "No Justice, No Peace!"

There was a large-scale police presence, with numerous squad cars and at least two helicopters hovering overhead. Police separated the protest from a tiny pro-Israeli counterdemonstration. At the end of the protest, police squad cars led a march through downtown Detroit to a local church, where speakers representing a number of participating organizations enjoined the crowd to put pressure on President-elect Barack Obama.

The WSWS spoke with many demonstrators during the rally. The most typical sentiments expressed were anger and disgust toward the US, Israel and the Arab regimes of the Middle East. There was deep outrage over the atrocities committed against the people of Gaza. Some protesters held gruesome posters of the disfigured corpses of small children killed by Israeli bombs.

Nadine Chamala, a student from Dearborn High School, said that she believes that the purpose of Israel's assault is "to destroy what's left of Palestine." But she held special anger for the Mubarak regime in Egypt, saying that they "were playing the worst role" in the war. "What Mubarak is doing is just as bad as Israel," she said. "They are slamming the door shut on the Palestinians."

Widad and Hussein described themselves as both teachers and students at the University of Michigan, Dearborn.

Widad complained of the news coverage and politicians in the US, who “blame a whole people for attempting to defend their homes. They try to use religion and Islam as a rationale for carrying out crimes against the Palestinians.” “The US is the biggest defender of Israel,” Hussein added.

Neda, a student at the University of Michigan, said that in supporting Israel the US was betraying the democratic ideals established by its own revolution. “The United States was based on the self-determination of a people,” she said.

Many protesters expressed their disgust with Obama. This marked a change from the mood at a rally in Dearborn held little more than a week ago, where protesters expressed the hoped that Obama, once he assumes the presidency, would ameliorate the plight of the Palestinians.

Of Obama, Widad said, “We all want and wish for big change. A lot of us have a feeling of disappointment. We all supported Obama in the election.”

The Arab American population in the Detroit area is heavily working class. The *World Socialist Web Site* was able to speak with some autoworkers at the demonstration.

Raed and Zuhare are two young autoworkers at Chrysler. Zuhare called Egypt’s complicity in the attack on Gaza “worse than the Israeli act itself.” Raed said Mubarak was bowing before pressure from the US and Israel, but he blamed Zionism for the crisis in the Middle East. “Before Zionism,” he said, “Jews and Arabs lived together in peace for centuries.”

The WSWS also spoke separately with Ali, another autoworker. The three young autoworkers all expressed concern over their jobs.



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