

Mass demonstrations in France against the Israeli assault on Gaza

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The revulsion felt worldwide against the indiscriminate massacre of the people of Gaza by Israel was expressed in France by mass demonstrations Saturday in 90 cities and towns. At a conservative police estimate of 123,000 (30,000 in Paris and 93,000 in the rest of France), they far surpassed the already large mobilisations of January 3, when 21,000 demonstrated in Paris.

Organisers claimed over 100,000 in the capital January 10. News agencies spoke of “a human tide.” A force of 3,800 police officers was on duty to prevent a repetition of incidents after the January 3 demonstration.

Organised by the National Collective for a Just and Enduring Peace between Palestinians and Israelis, the protests were supported by the NPA (the New Anti-capitalist Party of Olivier Besancenot), the Communist Party, the Independent Workers’ Party (formerly the Workers Party of Pierre Lambert) and the Greens, as well as by the CGT (General Confederation of Labour), the FSU teachers union, the UNEF students union and Palestinian, Arab and Muslim organisations.

All these organisations put forward a policy of pressurizing French, European and US imperialism to intervene and halt the massacre and propose nationalist, two-state solutions to the Palestinian tragedy.

Marie-George Buffet of the Communist Party, marching at the head of the Paris demonstration, told the press, “The European Union must be told: ‘You have the means to stop this war, to intervene in the UN

for the setting up of an international protection force and for political discussions to start again.”

Riot police and *gendarmes* were on every side street with body armour and lorries with grills attached for pushing the crowd. There were police at every Metro station entrance in constant radio contact, probably with orders to close the Metro entrances in case of a confrontation with youth. Some of the riot cops in body armour were videotaping the protest march.

The march started off with only the hardcore members and supporters from the different parties and organizations, but then from about 3.45pm there was a surge of people that filled the whole street. There were many youth from the working class suburbs and whole families including babies and the elderly. Some youth burned American and Israeli flags when they got close to the beginning of the march.

Many immigrant and French workers came independently of the organisers to express their bitter anger at Sarkozy’s support for Israel. Young people were in the majority and there was a strong presence of immigrant girls and women.

Near the Place de la Bastille, some protesters sat down and sang songs in sympathy with the Palestinian people. A man climbed onto the Bastille fountain and brandished a banner proclaiming, “Arab governments, enough cowardice, stop collaborating!” One speaker shouted: “This place is the symbol of the French Revolution, it gave us justice and equality and fraternity. In this historical place, we demand the same for the Palestinian people.”

Other banners proclaimed “Israel murderer, Sarkozy complicit,” “Rama Yade [the French minister for human rights]: where are Gaza’s human rights?,” “Bush—Olmert murderers, Obama—Sarkozy accomplices!,” “Palestinians, Afghans, Iraqis, immigrants: the same enemy, the same fight,” “The enemy of the Palestinians is in our country: he’s Bush’s friend Monsieur Sarkozy!”

Women protestors brought baby dolls with the words, “Israel kills the children of Gaza” printed on them. Referring to the Warsaw Ghetto a placard read, “Warsaw, Gaza the same massacre, the same executioners” and “Stop the Holocaust in Gaza.”

Near the Opera Bastille a woman demonstrator stood up on its steps holding a homemade placard inscribed with red letters: “The day will come when you will have to pay for your war crimes.” Protestors brought the photos of young victims of the Israeli bombardment.

The *World Socialist Web Site* interviewed people on the Paris demonstration.

Djamel, 26, a student said, “People in my neighbourhood are saying we must demonstrate, cry out, tell them to stop. It’s a small country and nobody’s there to save them. All states must intervene and set up a force to stop Israel. Sarkozy thinks that because there are a lot of Muslims in France it would be good to intervene to give France a good image.”

Ahmed, 56, said, “The Israelis have a free hand to do what they want. As long as this problem goes on, we will be heading for catastrophe, not only in the region, but in the whole world. Sarkozy is playing politics. He’s blowing hot and cold. Long live peace For that what’s needed is for the Americans to want it, but they don’t.”

Zouere, 21, a student said, “It’s wrong to kill innocent people who are already destitute. We must try

to send aid, medicine. We know what Sarkozy does, he mainly just talks. He just makes promises.”

Julien, 25, a postgraduate student said, “I’m afraid Obama won’t be any different from Bush, and Europe is the same. The UN should be the only armed force there. What is needed is the political merger of Israel and Palestine. It’s a long way off but they must go in that direction.”

Reda, 32, a social worker and Kamel, 35, an architect, had handed out 5,000 leaflets listing the companies which finance Israel and calling for them to be boycotted. Reda said, “Apart from my Arab origins ... I would be against what is happening in Gaza.

Kamel said, “You don’t know where you are with Sarkozy. Indirectly he supports Israel, but he goes to see the Arabs, but the bad Arabs, those who support Israel, such as the Syrian president. We are witnessing a genocide.”

Noureddine, 58, an oil expert, said, “I went to Palestine from 1971 to 1973 ... What is happening was elaborated with the assistance of French policy—let’s be clear, not that of the French people—to the advantage of Israel. Sarkozy’s intervention and that of the Egyptian president are identical. They’re working for Israel. Sarkozy is defending French interests, the big companies like Alstom—what he was elected to do. Obama has kept quiet about Gaza because there are American interests which he can’t touch at the moment.”



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