

Britain: Tens of thousands protest Gaza assault

Paul Mitchell
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In London, tens of thousands of demonstrators, including families and young children, marched in freezing weather from Hyde Park to the Israeli embassy. The BBC put the number of protestors at 50,000, while organizers claimed 100,000 in attendance.

The march was part of an international day of protest as large numbers of people around the world expressed opposition to the Israeli terror in Gaza. The barbaric attack on the virtually defenceless Palestinian population is outraging millions.

Tens of thousands also marched in Paris and 100,000 in Madrid. Large protests were also held in other Spanish cities, in Duisburg, Germany, Jakarta, Indonesia, and Washington, D.C.

Demonstrators in London were met at the embassy by row upon row of riot police who virtually closed Kensington High Street and prevented the marchers from reaching the final rally.

The media have focused on the sporadic outbreaks of violence that occurred as a result, with one shop window smashed and a single policeman apparently knocked unconscious.

There was little coverage of the speeches delivered at the initial and final rallies. However, it must be said that the various comments offered little perspective for the huge crowd. Once again, the organisers—Stop the War Coalition, Palestine Solidarity Campaign and

Muslim organisations—sought to channel popular anger back towards the labour bureaucracy through its discredited Labour Party parliamentarians and trade union leaders, none of whom have any mass support.

A statement was read out from former London Mayor Ken Livingstone. Public and Civil Services union deputy general secretary Hugh Lanning declared, “It’s great to see trade unions here after so many years.” However, there were only a handful of union banners present, and just one from Lanning’s own PCS union. In addition, there was not a single Labour Party banner.

Yet, Labour MPs, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and trade union officials made up half the platform. There was a lacklustre response by the crowd to these speakers as they called for more pressure on the British government to stop Israel’s “disproportionate” response to Hamas rocket attacks. Prime Minister Gordon Brown and his ministers have repeatedly insisted that the Israeli aggression is a legitimate act of self-defence and Hamas is responsible for the suffering of the Palestinians.

Other speakers included Betty Hunter from the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, one of the march organizers. She declared, “We have to convince the British government to stop supporting Israel.” Labour MEP Richard Howitt also called on the European Parliament to take action against Israel, but all he could offer was a vague promise that the socialist grouping would vote no to upgrading diplomatic relations.

A number of Jewish intellectuals and artists also spoke at the rally to oppose the religious zealots and right-wing fanatics who seek to intimidate anti-Zionist

Jews. Michael Cushman (Jews for Justice for Palestinians) called for an end to the murders in Gaza and an end to its blockade and occupation. He said the attack was all to do with three elections—the US presidential election, which Israel used as a cover to assassinate Hamas militants, the election of Hamas, which it refuses to recognize, and the Israeli election in a few days’ time.

Well-known children’s poet Michael Rosen read out a new poem, which started,

In Gaza, children, you learn that the sky kills and that houses hurt

You learn that your blanket is smoke and your breakfast is dirt

You learn that cars do somersaults and clothes turn red

Friends become statues, bakers don’t sell bread

And ended,

The land is for all

You have the right not to be dead

Lauren Booth, the sister-in-law of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, now the Middle East Quartet’s envoy, criticized Blair for his comments over the Gaza assault.

“Tony Blair’s only comment regarding the cease-fire has been to say that it can only take place after the tunnels in Gaza are destroyed,” she said. “What he is suggesting means that after the massacre, people will have no access to food, kerosene and medicines that came through those tunnels. That is not a cease-fire. That is a slow agonizing death.”

Around 6,000 to 10,000 people marched through central Edinburgh to express their opposition to the brutal Israeli assault on Gaza.

Marchers, many carrying Palestinian flags, walked from beside Waverley Station to police roadblocks near the US consulate in Regent Terrace. Hundreds of demonstrators in Edinburgh threw shoes towards the

consulate, in solidarity with Iraqi journalist Muntader al-Zaidi, and in disgust at the actions of the Israeli government, and its US backer.

Edinburgh Stop the War circulated an electronic petition calling for the British Prime Minister to “do everything in his power” to impose an arms embargo on Israel.

Protests also took place in Aberdeen, Newcastle, Manchester and Southampton.

On Sunday, the Stop the War Coalition’s website “suffered a serious attack,” “hacked, we assume by supporters of Israel’s attacks on Gaza,” the group reported. “Our website is down and our usual email address not functioning,” a statement read, promising a resumption of normal service.



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