Thousands oppose Gaza flotilla attack in London

Zach Reed
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Upwards of 10,000 people marched from Downing Street to the Israeli Embassy in London on June 5 to condemn the criminal attack on the Gaza aid flotilla by Israel on May 31. The attack, which occurred in international waters, saw the murder of nine Turkish civilians on board a Turkish-flagged ship attempting to deliver much-needed aid to Gaza, which remains under an Israeli blockade.

A protest also took place in Edinburgh on the same day, drawing up to 5,000.

There were chants and signs of "Free, Free Palestine", "End the Siege", "We are all Palestinian" and "Stop Israeli Piracy". Many of the protestors were from the Turkish population in London.

As the march passed a military barracks, soldiers leaned out of windows waving the British flag and hurling insults, particularly at Muslims.

Before the march began, speakers addressed the protestors outside Downing Street. Director Ken Loach called on the British government to respect international law and to begin doing so by acting against Israel. He criticised the BBC for broadcasting pro-Israeli propaganda.

Following the march, speeches began outside the Israeli embassy, with speakers including some of those who had been on board the flotilla, or who were involved with the groups that organized it. Most limited themselves to demands for the British government to put pressure on Israel, with one speaker claiming that protests "can and will force" international pressure on the Israeli government.

Some speakers gave their support to Hamas, while one urged the Turkish government to take the campaign forward against Israeli imperialism.

In reality, the world's major powers continue to defend Israel because they pursue their own criminal imperialist ambitions and represent the same class forces.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to young people and workers attending the protest.

Priyesh Gupta, an overseas student from India studying at Reddich University, explained that he "came along to the demonstration because Israel committed a heinous crime in international waters. It has been disregarding international opinion for far too long.

"It was ridiculous that Israel has been put in charge of the investigation…Turkey should be in charge of any investigation and under no circumstances Israel because they are the accused. How can the accused have the right to investigate? Is the world out of its mind?"

Hassan, a second-generation British citizen of Iraqi descent, was involved with the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign at Durham University. He said, "This has been going on for a long time and it has escalated this time. This action was blatantly and inexcusably unjust. We had to come here and make our voices known."

Hassan believed that Israel could act with impunity because of the backing of the United States and other western powers "who give Israel every chance possible." He said, "They use every excuse to justify their actions. The United Nations is powerless to act and it just goes along with Israel and its allies."

He added that it is "important to distinguish that the government of Israel is not necessarily always the voice of its people. Some Israeli professors are very vocal of their criticisms of Israel, as well as people who refuse to join the army."

Many people at the march make it too simplistic, suggesting that every Israeli citizen hates Palestinians

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and wants them destroyed, Hassan said, adding, “to paint Israelis as one person or thing is wrong.” He concluded that Hamas is no friend of the Palestinian working class and “they don’t represent progress.”

Banu, a young Turkish woman living in the UK, has been coming to pro-Palestinian demonstrations for the last 10 years, and believed the BBC was an apologist for Israel. Although expressing a hope that this event would alter the Turkish government’s friendly relation with Israel and lead to Turkey cancelling its arms agreements with Tel Aviv, she had doubts about how genuine its condemnation of the Gaza blockade was, given that the Turkish government has begun a new offensive against its own Kurdish minority. She said that Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyep Erdogan “is two-faced because if the Palestinian occupation should end then so should the occupation of Kurdistan by Turkey.”

Banu said that she had no illusions in US President Barack Obama, given that on the first week of his new administration Pakistan was bombed. In terms of the UK’s agenda in the region, she said, “It is not that different from the USA. The UK government is implicated in war crimes in the same way as the US is.”

She said that she has been meeting more and more Israelis who are left-wing. She also said that there were demonstrations in Israel and that Israelis she knows personally were outraged by what happened: “It’s important to distinguish the Israeli government from the people. In Turkey following the attack there were a lot of anti-Semitic statements and demonstrations, which I disagreed with. Such perspectives ultimately strengthen Zionism.”

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