

Toronto demonstration denounces Gaza assault, Canadian complicity

A WSWS reporting team
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More than four thousand people took to the streets of downtown Toronto last Saturday to denounce the Israeli government's murderous assault on Gaza.

The march began at Queen's Park, seat of the Ontario legislature, and concluded outside the US consulate, in recognition of Washington's pivotal role in propping up and arming the Zionist state.

The protest also took aim at Canadian government complicity. Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his Conservative government have long-boasted they are Israel's staunchest international supporter. True to form, they have defended every action taken by the Netanyahu government and the Israeli military during the bombardment and invasion of Gaza—including the slaughter of civilians.

Canada's opposition parties, including the social-democratic NDP, have followed suit, providing alibis for Israeli war crimes, while denouncing Hamas as terrorists.

Large numbers of Palestinian-Canadians and others of Middle Eastern origin joined Saturday's protest. Similar protests have been held in recent days across Canada, including in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa and Montreal.

There was a large police presence at Saturday's demonstration in Toronto and a small counter-protest organized by the fascistic Jewish Defence League (JDL). The JDL, which had boasted on its website that it intended to "confront the supporters of Hamas," sought to taunt and provoke the demonstrators. *The National Post*, *Toronto Sun* and other neo-conservative media voices have seized on a handful of minor altercations, most of them deliberately provoked by rightwing Zionists, at protests against the Israeli assault on Gaza to slander them as "violent" and un-Canadian. *World Socialist Web Site* reporters spoke with many of

those attending Saturday's protest.

Susan, who was born on the West Bank, said that she had come with her son to denounce the Israeli occupation of Palestine. "They've been bombing the people in the refugee camps every year or two, for the last ten years," said Susan. "The government of Israel does not represent the people and it is the same thing all over the world."

Lela, a Canadian youth of part Iranian and part Quebecois origin, said she felt she had to voice her outrage over the slaughter in Gaza. "I can't keep waking up and seeing pictures of civilians who are covered in blood and have nothing really to do with the situation," explained Lela. "It's a war of power and land and continually misguided interpretations of religion. I think we need to do whatever we can to stop the killing."

Asked about the Harper government's claims that the Israeli government is acting in self-defence, Lela said, "This is not defence. This is an offensive. What they've done, targeting people only claiming they're not, it's such false advertising. Sending anything near a hospital is not an act of defence, that's an attack. I can't believe that the Canadian government could [sanction] that."

Jamie, a Toronto teacher, said the situation in Israel is similar to the apartheid regime that existed in South Africa. "Israel," said Jamie, "promotes a system that has first class citizens and second-class citizens. Second-class citizens are those of Arab descent and the Bedouins in the south." In addition, he continued, there are millions of Palestinians who have been dispossessed of their lands and rendered refugees in the West Bank, Gaza and beyond. "So," continued Jamie, "it's literally creating a 21st Century version of a Bantustan, like what they had in South Africa for the

blacks. Keep them in an open-air prison, keep them blockaded off, don't allow them to fish the oceans, don't allow them access to fresh water—as the Israelis do.

“I don't believe the Israeli government speaks for all Jewish people. They speak for a very tiny segment of hard-core Zionists.”

Asked about what he thought of the perspective advanced by WSWs to unite Arab and Jewish workers in the fight for a socialist Middle East, Jamie said, “I think that as working people, we need to realize that our struggles are universal, are worldwide. In Canada we face the same thing. More people are working in retail than ever before; a declining standard of living; money flowing to the top, and there's no initiative to make the playing field more equal among people. It's the same thing playing out in the Middle East too.”

Schohaib, a Toronto bank worker originally from Afghanistan, told the WSWs he is a supporter of the “Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions” movement (BDS). Initiated by a coalition of Palestinian bourgeois nationalist parties and “civil society” groups, it claims Israel can be compelled through sanctions and corporate disinvestment to comply with international law and agree to a “two-state solution.”

Said Schohaib, “We are here to demonstrate peacefully and to raise awareness of what's going on. It's all under the pretext, under the cover of a nation-state being able to defend itself against rockets coming in on civilians. However, if you study this in more detail, an occupying force cannot defend itself against such activities because they're an occupying force.

“The way forward is to end the occupation and go by rules of law that apply to everybody. Once you end the injustice I believe that will solve many of the world's problems.”

A young woman from the Middle East who didn't want to give her name deplored the Canadian government's support for the assault on Gaza. “Canada is just supporting Israel with their eyes closed,” she said. “I don't understand. “They're just closing their eyes and supporting war crimes.”



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