Protests through Europe against Israel’s war on Gaza

Robert Stevens
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Hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated throughout Europe over the weekend to protest Israel’s savage war on Gaza.

The largest demonstration took place in London where organisers estimated that 180,000 protested in Hyde Park after gathering at Victoria Embankment and marching through the capital.

Demonstrations were held in Germany, France, Spain and Italy, with protests in capitals, including Berlin and Paris as well as many other large cities across the continent.

Among the chants in London were, “Stop bombing Gaza” and "Free, free Palestine!” In London, the route took the march down Whitehall and as the crowd reached Downing Street they chanted “Boris Johnson, shame on you.”

Those attending brought a plethora of homemade banners including, “Bombing children isn't defence, it's murder”, “The British government is complicit in ethnic cleansing”, “Not 'conflict' and 'tensions'—occupation and apartheid”, “As long as the Israeli occupation exists, state terrorism will flourish”, “'Can't breathe' since 1948”, “The ongoing Nakba, 73 years is enough”, “The world is not free until Palestinians are free”, “UK is complicit—stop arming Israel for ethnic cleansing.”

The protests took place just hours after a ceasefire was announced between Israel and Hamas, but this was widely recognised among those attending the protests as nothing but a tenuous lull before Israel resumes hostilities against a defenceless population. These sentiments were summed up in banners in London including: “A ceasefire is not enough—end the occupation” and, in reference to the war crimes committed by the Israel Defense Forces, “Don't let the ceasefire fool you, 90k Palestinians are now displaced.”

Protests were held in cities across the UK and Ireland, including in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, Nottingham, Cardiff, Plymouth, Peterborough, Belfast and Dublin.

Thousands protested in Paris, denouncing the French president's backing of the assault on Gaza and defying his attempts to ban demonstrations in support of the Palestinians. One chant from protesters was “Israel assassin, Macron accomplice.” More than 1,000 marched in Lyon and around the same number in Lille. Other protests were held in Strasbourg, Toulouse and Montpellier. On Sunday, a protest was held in Marseille where one protester brought a placard reading, “In Palestine, confinement for more than 50 years.”

Numerous demonstrators in German cities again called for solidarity with Palestine, with thousands protesting across protests in Berlin, Frankfurt and Leipzig. In Berlin, where hundreds gathered in the Kreuzberg district, many demonstrators carried placards with the inscription "Free Palestine.”

Police in Berlin massed to intimidate protesters with around 3,000 of them on the streets. In comments leading up to the weekend, Chancellor Angela Merkel sought to tarnish the demonstrations by falsely associating them with anti-Semitism. She said that Germany’s Basic Law constitution, “guarantees the right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly,” while declaring, “Anyone who brings hatred of Jews onto our streets, who expresses seditious insults, is outside of our Basic Law. Such acts must be punished consistently and have noticeable consequences for the perpetrators.”

These lies are refuted by the many Jewish groups that have participated in protests worldwide in opposition to the war crimes carried out in Gaza by Israel and have

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called for the unity of Jews and Arabs. A banner of the Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East association at the Berlin protest read “Against attacks on synagogues and mosques in Berlin or Gaza.”

Several thousand marched through Dell'unita Square in Bologna Italy.

In Malaga, Spain, hundreds protested, including with many homemade banners. One read, “Free Palestine—End Colonialism.”

A protest was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

At the London protest, a number of placards were on display opposing the slander by governments and political parties of the ruling class internationally—including the ruling Tories and opposition Labour in Britain—equating opposition to Israel’s crimes with anti-Semitism. Among the placards were, “Opposing Zionism is not anti-Semitism” and “Criticising Israel is not anti-Semitic.”

Protestors cheered Stella Moris, the partner of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who told the demonstration:

“Julian is imprisoned right now because the US wants to extradite him for publications that exposes war crimes in Iraq, torture in Guantanamo and evidence of Israeli crimes against the Palestinians...

“He is paying with his freedom and maybe his life...

“Julian published the words spoken by Israeli government officials... words the military materialises in the form of airstrikes that kill women and children...

“To defend our right to know is to defend our right to shape or own destiny…”

Among the other speakers in London were nominal “lefts” Jeremy Corbyn, who led the Labour party from 2015-20, and his former shadow chancellor John McDonnell. Corbyn told the crowd in Hyde Park, "We will be here as long as is it takes until the Palestinian people are free. We will never give up on the Palestinian people, we will never go away from the Palestinian people and their cause.” McDonnell added, "The message is clear, we will not cease our campaign in solidarity until there is justice.”

Corbyn and McDonnell could not be more cynical given the massive campaign to portray protests against the war as anti-Semitic. From the time he took over as party leader, they did nothing but capitulate to the vitriolic campaign conducted in ruling circles, and spearheaded by the Labour right, to smear them and their hundreds of thousands of supporters as anti-Semites. Rushing to placate the Blairites, the first thing Corbyn did upon becoming Labour leader was to cancel plans to address a Stop the War Coalition meeting before announcing his resignation as its chairman.

The smear campaign based on vile slanders, facilitated all down the line by Corbyn and McDonnell, has led to the suspension and expulsion of many of their supporters, and to Corbyn himself having the Labour whip withdrawn last November by party leader Sir Keir Starmer.

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