French protesters denounce genocidal Israeli onslaught against Gaza

Our reporters
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On Sunday, significant protests took place in France's major cities in opposition to the French government's unconditional support for the Israeli government as it prepares to launch a genocidal ground operation against the population of the Gaza Strip. Until Thursday all protests in opposition to Israel's murderous bombing campaign against Gaza had been banned in France and dozens were arrested for organising peaceful protests or displaying Palestinian flags. The Paris prefecture only announced that the protest would be permitted on Saturday.

While a recent ruling by the constitutional council meant that the government's ban on pro-Palestinian protests has been temporarily lifted, it is still possible to be arrested for "apology for terrorism" for as little as carrying a Palestinian flag in France.

Despite the threat of police violence and arrest for voicing their support for the Palestinians—and very late notice—15,000 protested in Paris. Thousands also marched in Marseille and hundreds in smaller cities throughout France. Two hundred people gathered in Nice despite a continued ban by the local authorities and the organisers were arrested.

In Paris, the WSWS spoke to Sara, a master's student, who explained why she came to protest. "This genocide, I think we can't even talk about a conflict, it's not even a war. It has taken everything from us, regardless of our religion, our origins and it hurts our hearts," she said.

Sara condemned the Macron government's support for the Israeli onslaught, "You can see it on my placard, it says 'Macron accomplice.' For me, it is even more broadly the West which is complicit. … we saw a very different treatment for Ukraine."

Zahira, a medical student, explained, "I came to support the Palestinian people and prevent a new *Nakba*, a genocide of the Palestinian people. I come from Lebanon, I see what is happening there in the region, and I see every day the massacres committed by Israeli criminals in Palestine, the bombings against hospitals, schools. The Israeli government is the new Nazism today, and everyone must fight to prevent it."

She also expressed support for Israelis who are protesting against the fascistic Netanyahu government, "It is the fault of the far-right [Netanyahu] government which has made bad decisions since its election. Yes, I support the Israelis against their own government."

Lina, a 15-year-old high school student, told the WSWS, "The genocide that is happening is absolutely inhumane. To call this conflict, this war, when it is simply a genocide [is wrong]. This has been happening for many years, for 75 years. We are given the impression that it started with Hamas this October, but this has been going on for 75 years."

Sunday's protests took place in a climate of heavy state repression. On Friday, French police arrested the local head of the CGT-59 union for a pro-Palestinian statement. Interior minister Gérald Darmanin has also opened legal actions against the New Anti-capitalist Party as well as Unsubmissive France deputy Danièle Obono.

In one telling case, Darmanin publicly denounced French footballer Karim Benzema, who is of Algerian descent, as a sympathiser of the Muslim Brotherhood without any substantiation after the Ballon d'Or winner tweeted, "All our prayers for the inhabitants of Gaza who are once again victims of these unjust bombings which spare no women or children." Later, Valérie Boyer, vice-president of the French Republican Party called for Benzema's French citizenship to be revoked.

As part of this crackdown, the head of the French

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Jewish Union for Peace (FJUP) was arrested at a protest in Strasbourg last week for carrying a Palestinian flag.

At the Paris protest, the WSWS spoke to Jean Guy Greilsamer, a Parisian member of the FJUP. Jean Guy stated, “The situation in Gaza is dire. This is a genocidal policy on the part of Israel. Of course, we sympathize with all those who may have died during the Hamas attack. But it must nevertheless be clarified that it was not only Hamas, but that it was several associations fighting for the liberation of the Palestinian people who worked together to ensure that there was an offensive against Israel.”

“France is one of the worst countries for supporting Israel. Macron pretends to say ‘Yes, but it has to be a certain moderation.’ But in reality, until now, he has always fully supported not only Netanyahu, but Netanyahu’s representatives in France, the ‘official’ Jewish institutions.”

“Macron’s policy brings far-right ideology into French society. From this point of view, we are very mobilized because we say that the Nazi genocide must never happen again for anyone, not just for the Jews. All of the ‘friends of Israel’ want us to believe the opposite.”

Soufiane, a journalist attending the protest, dismissed with contempt attacks on Palestinians as “terrorists.” He said, “Between 1955 and 1962, the FLN and the FLN mujahadins were considered terrorists. And similarly, we can consider that there was violence against civilians, against state officials which were perhaps in themselves reprehensible. But what we remember is that their struggle made it possible to achieve independence and they are heroes of the Algerian cause.”

He continued, “In the same way, French resistance fighters blew up mines under the Germans, during the Occupation they purged French civilians who had collaborated with the occupier. And today these people are rightly considered heroes of the French resistance.”

The WSWS also spoke to protesters in Marseille on Sunday. Soraya, a laywer, expressed disbelief at the French government’s ban on pro-Palestinian protests, “I don’t understand how the country of human rights can ban protests.” She pointed to the significance of pro-Palestinian protests internationally, “I am Tunisian and I have been watching the demonstrations taking place in Tunis and I am impressed by the number of people who gathered and who were able to express themselves in global support. However, France did not authorize the French to express themselves.”

He also reflected on the efforts of the Netanyahu government backed by the Biden administration to drag Hezbollah and Iran into a wider, global conflict. He said, “You really have to ask yourself the question and think about it. The United States sent its aircraft carrier to the gates of the Middle East to be ready to attack. I think there is going to be a much broader conflict.”

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