

Widespread protests in Ireland oppose Israel's war on the Palestinians

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After centuries of brutal colonial rule by Britain, the Irish population has long been deeply sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. Every outburst of Israeli violence over the decades has generated powerful opposition.

Numerous demonstrations and protests against the Israeli government's genocidal assault on Gaza have been held since October 7. Last Saturday, October 21, several thousand people waving Palestinian flags marched through central Dublin to a rally in Merrion Square. The previous week, thousands marched to the Israeli embassy in Shelbourne Road, where police barricades were set up to protect the building.

Both marches in Dublin demanded the Israeli ambassador be expelled from the country. Midweek protests outside the embassy raised the same demand. A Galway doctor, Palestinian Abdullah Al Bayvari, told RTE, "It's reminiscent of 1948, when we were asked to leave our homes and we held onto our keys, and we held onto our deeds, in the hope that as they promised we could return, and we never returned."

On October 19, protestors occupied the European Parliament Liaison Office in Dublin to call for a ceasefire in Gaza, and for immediate humanitarian relief. The newly formed Dublin for Gaza spokesperson, academic David Landy, commented on X/Twitter that the "EU is offering full vocal support to these atrocities in defiance of any norms of international law and in defiance of the wished of decent European citizens. We believe that Israel's campaign of mass murder and ethnic cleansing amounts to an act of genocide, under the legal definition adopted by the United Nations. We are occupying the EU Commission offices as an act of protest against EU complicity in these genocidal acts."

In Belfast, capital of British-controlled Northern

Ireland, on successive weekends, thousands of people have marched through the city centre. Last Saturday, in an event organised by Belfast Stands with Palestine, protestors marched from Belfast City Hall to the BBC's Broadcasting House in Ormeau Avenue before hearing speeches denouncing US President Joe Biden, Britain's Rishi Sunak and the European Union's (EU) Ursula von der Leyen.

In Derry, around 2,000 people filled the city's Guildhall Square and staged a Rally for Palestine. Catherine Hutton of the Derry branch of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign told *Derry Now*, "A child has been killed every 15 minutes since October 7 in Gaza. Let that sink in. The Palestinian people need us now."

Emergency protests have also been held in Cork, Ennis, Tralee, Lurgan, Dundalk, Omagh, Dungannon and Longford. This week, protests were planned in Ballincollig, Newry, Castlebar and Limerick.

But while millions have been horrified by Israel's genocidal violence, the Irish political establishment, balancing between the US, the EU and the UK, and dependent on investment from all three, has doggedly covered for its imperialist patrons on both sides of the Atlantic.

Opening an October 18 debate in the Dáil Éireann, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, Fianna Fáil's Micheál Martin, condemned the October 7 attack by Hamas, describing the desperate and suicidal uprising against the concentration camp conditions in Gaza as "heinous", "savage and brutal" and "reprehensible". He "underlined that there is no justification—none—for such terror." But he then dutifully endorsed "Israel's right of self defence," cynically calling for this to be within the framework of international law.

The debate was held in the immediate aftermath of the bombing of the Al-Ahli Arab hospital by Israeli forces, likely with an American bomb. Yet Martin groveled over “the intense diplomatic engagement being undertaken by the United States at this time. Secretary of State Blinken is engaged with several key partners in the region. The visit of President Biden to Israel today is also very significant, although I very much regret that Arab leaders who were scheduled to meet him in Amman will no longer do so.”

Martin called for the EU, whose leading powers and politicians have all backed Israeli bombing, to play “a constructive and credible role in this crisis” and requested that EU funding for the Palestinians be sustained.

Prospective coalition partners and currently topping opinion polls, Sinn Féin took a marginally more critical line, aware of the deeply rooted support for the Palestinians among the party’s members and more broadly in the working class.

In the same debate, party President Mary Lou McDonald denounced Israeli violence: “As we speak, the Gazan people face annihilation. Entire families are being wiped out, hundreds of thousands are being displaced from their homes, and their schools, hospitals and vital infrastructure are being obliterated. They are now running out of food. They are drinking unsanitised water in a desperate attempt to stay alive.”

But McDonald’s fundamental point, as with the government, was to call for the imperialist powers to uphold the international laws they are now trampling over. “As the people of Gaza cling to their very existence, the leadership of the international community must now resurrect those values it claims to hold dear.”

McDonald was backed by Sinn Féin’s Foreign Affairs spokesman Matt McCarthy, who threw in an attack on Hamas for good measure. “Let us be very clear. Hamas breached international law on 7 October. It targeted innocent civilians in the most callous and inhumane manner and its actions have been rightly condemned by right-thinking people around the world.” McCarthy then listed Israel’s countless breaches of international law and again appealed to the “international community to tell Israel to stop the blockade, the apartheid, the annexation and the genocide.”

The “international community” invocation barely conceals an appeal to the rampaging imperialist powers and their allies to politely urge Israel to be more “civilised”.

The Irish bourgeoisie, claiming to have a degree of independence, is entirely dependent on the imperialist powers and complicit in their crimes.

This is confirmed by the detachment of Irish troops on the Lebanon/Israel border. Ireland has maintained a small number troops as part of Unifil, the United Nation’s 10,500 strong “Interim Force in Lebanon”, since 1978. Established as a multinational monitoring force, the UN operation currently assists the Lebanese Armed Forces in policing a “blue line” defined after Israel’s attack on Lebanon in 2006.

Fighting is escalating sharply around the blue line and another Israeli attack has been threatened repeatedly by the Netanyahu government, as the US seeks a wider war in the region targeting Iran and its allies—Syria, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The 123rd Battalion, made up of 334 soldiers, is to be dispatched to the Lebanese border imminently. The BBC reported Thursday that Ireland’s Department of Foreign Affairs has warned its citizens to leave Lebanon immediately, while it is still possible.

Meanwhile, the Irish government has committed 170 troops to participate in the EU’s Battlegroup system, comprised of 18 battle groups of 1,500 soldiers, aimed at rapid response peacekeeping and warfighting in conditions of a new violent redivision of the world. Training for the Irish troops is to commence in Germany next year.

The only genuinely international power that can stand against war is the working class, to the extent its struggles are unified globally and directed towards the fight for socialism and the abolition of the nation state system in the Middle East, and worldwide.



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