

Hundreds protest Gaza genocide at Friends of the IDF gala in San Carlos, California

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On Sunday, November 5, over 500 pro-Palestinian protesters gathered outside the Hiller Aviation Museum in San Carlos, California, near San Francisco, to protest an annual gala held by the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces (FIDF).

The demonstration was held under very tense conditions. A SWAT unit was deployed and dozens of heavily armed police confronted and surrounded the crowd of protesters at one point.

One protester with a handmade sign that read, “Lawyers against Genocide,” pointed out to WSWS reporters that she noticed police snipers on the roof of a hotel across the freeway from the museum.

Only a few dozen people appeared to participate in the gala itself. As they entered and exited the museum, protesters chanted, “Shame on you!” and “Stop bombing children!”

The protest was organized by Jewish Voice for Peace, the International Jewish Anti-Zionism Network, and the Palestinian Youth Movement. Many young protesters, including those of Jewish, Arab and Latino backgrounds came to protest, a reflection of the fact that the current genocide is not a “religious” “racial” or “national” question, but an attack on the entire international working class.

The FIDF is a “non-profit charity” that was founded in 1981 to “support the heroic men and women of the IDF.” The organization is the only one authorized by the state of Israel to collect donations on behalf of the IDF and it has deep connections to the US and Israeli government.

Since its inception FIDF has hosted charity balls, ceremonies, golf outings and various other “networking” functions with politicians, billionaires and generals that feature IDF soldiers as guest speakers in order to gin up support for the Zionist state of Israel.

At a 2016 FIDF New York Gala, the organization honored deceased billionaire casino boss and Trump supporter Sheldon Adelson and his wife Miriam Adleson with the inaugural “Defenders of Israel” award. At the event, it was revealed the Adelsons had pledged \$10 million to the organization that year alone.

The current CEO of the FIDF, Rabbi Steven Weil, took over the organization in September 2020 and, according to tax forms submitted with the IRS, was paid well over \$600,000 in 2022, or over \$50,000 a month in this capacity.

The current national director of the organization is IDF Major General (Res.) Nadav Padan. In a press release announcing his hire two years ago, Weil noted that Padan “helped shape the face of the IDF and the state of Israel for over 36 years.”

Touting Padan’s credentials, the statement noted he was “awarded the ‘Legion of Merit’ for promoting projects on behalf of the US Armed Forces, after serving as the IDF’s found forces liaison in Washington D.C. from 2007 to 2009.”

While not currently in the IDF, Weil enjoys close connections with influential American politicians that regularly support military aid to Israel. On his Twitter/X account, Weil has previously posted several photographs of himself smoking cigars and embracing politicians, billionaires and Israeli generals. In the former category, this includes former New York City mayor and top Trump-coup lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, Republican Senators Tim Scott (South Carolina) and Tom Cotton (Arkansas) and Democratic Senators Debbie Stabenow (Michigan) and former Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Ben Cardin (Maryland).

During the Trump presidency, Weil flaunted his close connections to the administration. At a 2017 “Gala for the Museum of the Bible,” Weil posted photographs of himself having dinner with then Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, and speaking to the assembled crowd after being introduced by Richard DeVos Jr., husband of Betsy DeVos, the former United States Secretary of Education in the Trump administration.

Sunday’s gala in San Carlos was billed as a 75 year commemoration of the establishment of Israel.

A WSWS reporting team spoke with many protesters, all of whom expressed anger over Israel’s genocide in the Palestinian territories.

One protester identified themselves as Ousai, the name of a relative who had recently been slain by the IDF in the West Bank.

“That’s my wife’s cousin who just got killed last week. A

16-year-old boy, who was just throwing rocks at the Israeli military inside his own village after school.

“There’s no repercussions. [IDF soldiers] have a free ride. If anything, they might get an award for it.”

Ousai reacted enthusiastically to the idea of a political general strike by the working class to stop the genocide. “That has to happen. That has to happen. I love that. The only way to stop this is to hit them in the pocketbook. Money talks...It has to hit people in the pocketbook.”

Another protester, Jacob, said, “I’m here in the recognition of the fact that the Hiller Aviation Museum is a like a community staple, where local schools and students have gone for field trips, and to see them be willing to host an event that directly supports the IDF and therefore the IDF’s actions in Palestine and the actual occupation of Palestinian land. I’m here in recognition of this, and the recognition that this needs to end.”

“Solidarity to all labor,” Jacob said, adding, “To be clear, I don’t include police forces or law enforcement in labor. Including police is not valid at all. But I support labor...‘I’m not going to do my job to protect other human beings elsewhere,’ is important. It is part of...respecting the value of humanity itself. I definitely support those workers and look forward to see what happens in Tacoma as well.”

Several of the protesters at the event had participated in or were familiar with the “block the boat” protest at the Port of Oakland on Friday. The militant action, which involved hundreds of people appealing to workers on the military logistics vessel *MV Cape Orlando*, delayed the boat for several hours. After the intervention of the US Coast Guard and the hundreds of police, the boat sailed to the Port of Tacoma where it was met by protests on Monday.

For over 12 hours on Monday, hundreds of people turned out to “block the boat” at the Port of Tacoma. Despite the militant actions of many protesters, the demonstration was not able to stop the loading, and eventual departure of the *Cape Orlando*.

“I am Latino, I come from a family that understands the extensive background of US [imperialist] war machine and the way that it has infiltrated every sect of our lives,” Jacob noted.

“From here in California in San Carlos, to Gaza. I mean we are talking about a war machine that is so well funded that people are starving. I think in March the US hit 24 percent rate of food insecurity... almost a quarter of the population can’t afford food. And things are getting worse.

“I cannot in good conscience look at any candidate, representative, and say ‘Yeah, you are doing your job well,’ because they are not. I mean if you think about what their job technically is, then, sure they’re doing a great job.

“But in terms of taking care of the people, they are hurting us

everyday. With every dime, every penny that is spent on funding war elsewhere, we are hurting the rest of the human race, we are hurting all the rest of the life here on this plant... I can’t stand by any elected representative, and I want to make sure they all know that this will not fly.

Nancy told the WWSWS, “I’m very disturbed by what’s going on. It’s been many days, about a month that the people in Gaza haven’t had water, or food, or fuel. The government of Israel, the military of Israel has been bombing them indiscriminately. It’s disturbing to see these videos of children being blown apart, and people supporting that. And now we’re protesting people coming to support the people who are bombing children. That’s why I’m here today, because I find this unconscionable.”

About the role of the Democratic Party in backing the genocide, Nancy said, “At this point I’m very disappointed in them. Very disappointed, but not surprised.”

Adele told the WWSWS, “I’m against funding towards mass killing. And [the FIDF] is raising money to for the government of Israel to kill more people and I’m against mass killing and genocide.”

Regarding the genocide in Gaza, Laura told the WWSWS, “The day that I was afraid of has finally come.

“Netanyahu’s reputation was completely soiled because of corruption, even with rabid Zionists. And when that happened, the right wing was just let loose upon Israel. And you knew, any day now, it would be let loose upon Gaza again. Especially when they started engaging in provocations at Al-Aqsa Mosque . That is often a signal that they are just ready to push and push...”

Laura was harshly critical of the mass media. “It used to be that the mainstream news, a certain percentage...a small aspect of the view from Palestinian eyes. But they have become so degenerate.

“You have to go outside the mainstream to learn the history. You have to go to the internet.”

Laura, said she was familiar with the *World Socialist Web Site*, and expressed support for the idea of a political general strike to stop the war. “There’s truly no reason why we can’t come together and make it happen.”



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