

Protesters march in Seoul against the genocide in Gaza

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Regular protests have taken place in South Korea against the ongoing genocide in Gaza at the hands of the Israeli military and backed by the US and other imperialist powers. While relatively small so far, hundreds have demonstrated in Seoul and other cities. The response of the political establishment demonstrates fear that the opposition will grow.

The latest protests took place on Friday, with hundreds again marching in Itaewon, Seoul, where many Muslim residents live. Carrying signs in Korean, English and Arabic, the demonstrators demanded an end to the genocide in Gaza and expressed solidarity with the Palestinians. They also denounced the Biden administration's role in enabling the slaughter. Participants compared the current barbaric actions of the Israeli government with the previous imperialist invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan led by the US.

Last Saturday, demonstrators held a rally near the US and Israeli embassies in Seoul, joining millions more around the world similarly marching to voice their opposition to the genocide. Rallies have also occurred in cities like Busan.

These demonstrations represent a latent anti-war sentiment within the South Korean population. No doubt many protesters and others sympathetic to the Palestinian cause draw the connections between the oppression Palestinians face and the brutal 35-year colonization of Korea at the hands of Japanese imperialism from 1910 to 1945.

However, these protests have largely been buried by the establishment media to prevent support for the Palestinians from spreading. Furthermore, the "progressive" bloc of the South Korean ruling class, which includes the main opposition Democratic Party of Korea (DP), and the various trade union and phony left-wing organizations in their orbit, has for the most

part similarly remained silent.

From the beginning, the Democrats backed the stance of President Yoon Suk-yeol and his right-wing administration. Both denounced the Palestinians for "indiscriminate attacks," tacitly endorsing Israel's absurd claims that its destruction of Gaza is self-defense. Seoul also abstained on a ceasefire vote in the United Nations at the end of October.

Conscious that the government and DP stood exposed in their support for genocide, which cuts across claims of supporting "human rights" in North Korea, DP lawmaker Kim Sang-hui on November 7 proposed a resolution in the National Assembly calling for a ceasefire. The resolution, however, draws an equal sign between the oppressed Palestinians and Israel's fascist Netanyahu regime.

According to media reports, the resolution states, "The National Assembly of the Republic of Korea expresses with one voice its deep concern regarding the unprecedented catastrophe in the Gaza Strip and the growing number of civilian casualties within Israel and Palestine *that are the result of the hostilities of both Israel and Palestine*" (emphasis added).

The resolution whitewashes both the genocide taking place and the decades of oppression that the Palestinians have suffered, during which Gaza was turned into an open-air prison. On October 7, the Palestinians rebelled against their oppressors in the Israeli government, who bear sole responsibility for what is now taking place. The call for a ceasefire, while accusing both sides of responsibility, amounts to blaming the Palestinians for resisting their jailers and killers.

The resolution further urges the South Korean government to work alongside countries that "follow international human rights law and humanitarian law."

Which countries this includes is left unsaid, but there can be little doubt Kim and the Democrats have in mind the US, which has been Israel's leading supporter in justifying and carrying out genocide.

The Democrats' goal is to put a progressive façade on the true character of South Korean capitalism, which essentially backs the slaughter in Gaza. Lawmakers like Kim seek to divert anti-war sentiment. Their aim is to convince opponents of war that these conflicts can be prevented by working within the confines of parliamentary democracy.

This is further demonstrated by the refusal of the Democrats and their trade union supporters to call any protests or demonstrations in support of the Palestinians. Since the start of the assault on Gaza, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) has issued only pro forma criticisms of the war, including a vague statement of support for Palestinians on November 8, one month after the Israeli onslaught began. The KCTU has done nothing to mobilize its membership or respond to the call by Palestinian labor unions for the blocking of arms shipments and potential military materiel to Israel.

This is even as the KCTU campaigns for an annual large-scale rally this Saturday in Seoul. Nothing has been published on the KCTU's media outlet *Nodong gwa Segye (Labor and the World)* about the war and the mass protests taking place.

This silence also ignores the ongoing US efforts to launch an attack on Iran and the agenda for instigating a larger conflict with China, which would quickly draw in South Korea, a key component of Washington's war planning.

Seoul, in fact, has used Hamas' supposed "surprise attack" to claim that North Korea has similar plans, thereby justifying the US military buildup in the region, Seoul's cooperation in these war plans, and the growing trilateral military alliance between the US, South Korea and Japan.

A leading organization in calling protests has been the pseudo-left group Workers Solidarity (WS). However, WS explicitly rejects the unity of the Arab and Jewish workers and unity with the working class internationally.

In a November 1 article titled "Israel's invasion of Gaza and the danger of a new Middle East war," WS blames the Israeli working class for the oppression of

the Palestinians. It claims that with the founding of Israel, "profits went not to the capitalists but to the workers through the Zionist state and that the state itself was organized for such a process." Therefore, the article claims, "there are structural reasons why the Israeli working class does not challenge Zionism."

This will only sow divisions between Arab and Jewish workers, whose common interests are antithetical to those of the Zionist capitalist ruling class and its imperialist backers. WS's position, in fact, legitimizes the Zionists' false claim to represent the interest of all Jewish people. Israel was founded as a beachhead for US and British imperialism in the resource-rich and strategically-critical Middle East.

The way forward against Israel's genocide in Gaza and the danger of war globally requires the unity of all workers, regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religion, including the Jewish and Arab workers throughout the Middle East, to overturn the capitalist nation-state system, the root cause of war, and fight for international socialism.



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