

“A general strike by teachers could force the government to call for a ceasefire”

Interview with New York City educator at Yemeni-American demonstration for Palestine

Jesse Thomas
10 January 2024

Hundreds showed up to a demonstration in the Bronx, New York City, on Saturday. Titled “Flood the Bronx for Gaza,” the event was held in “Little Yemen,” a neighborhood made up predominantly of Yemeni immigrants and their children. Protesters were largely workers, youth and small shop owners of Yemeni-American descent, but the protest also included a substantial number of young people of all backgrounds from the New York area.

The protest was sponsored by a coalition of organizations including Within Our Lifetime, City University of New York for Palestine, the Bronx Palestine Committee, Students for Justice in Palestine, the New York chapter of the Yemeni Alliance Committee, and the Gambian Youth Organization.

Slogans at the event expressed solidarity with Gaza against the US/Israeli genocide which began on October 7 and has claimed over 30,000 Palestinian lives. The phrase “Gaza called, Yemen answered, all Israeli boats are cancelled,” was chanted throughout the event. This was a reference to the latest US/NATO naval campaign, dubbed “Operation Prosperity Guardian,” which has deployed dozens of warships to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden off the coast of Yemen.

While the US has alleged that the aim of the campaign is to target Houthi rebels and eliminate the threat of “Iranian proxies,” in reality it is an offensive mission, the aim of which is to further encircle Iran and advance imperialism’s broader goal of reasserting its

dominance in the region.

The New York Police Department (NYPD) had a large and aggressive presence at the demonstration, with about 80 police facing off the crowd of roughly 300. As protesters gathered on White Plains Road, about 40 police officers forcefully pushed them toward the sidewalks, away from the main street. Notwithstanding the attempt by the police to intimidate it, the demonstration held steady, with the crowd gathering on nearby Rhineland Avenue.

Prior to the demonstration, Democratic US House Representative of New York’s 15th District Ritchie Torres slandered the event on X/Twitter, equating the slogan “Flood the Bronx” to a call for “an incitement of violence against Jews.” Torres has been a vocal pro-Zionist troll on social media and supporter of measures in Congress to vilify Palestinians.

At the protest, the WSWW interviewed Mona, a teacher in the New York City Public Schools system. She said the following:

“I wanted to come to this demonstration today because I’ve wanted to support the cause and get involved in organizing, considering the situation in Gaza. The US is completely partnered with Israel in this genocide against the Palestinian people. Both the Democratic and the Republican political parties are complicit.

“I’m against the idea of voting for the ‘lesser of two evils,’ because where has that gotten us? I will not vote for Joe Biden in the next election because I don’t want

any evil. What the current situation has shown is that Biden is indeed evil. And I do not want to contribute to evil anymore.

“I voted for Biden in the last election because I was under the impression that he would forgive student loans, which he did not do. And at the time, I voted for him because, unfortunately, I was duped into subscribing to the idea that you have to vote for the lesser of two evils. I told myself last time that if Biden did not make good on his promises, I wouldn’t vote for him again. Four years later, not only is everything the same, it is much, much worse...”

WSWS reporters referred to the regime of far-right slander and censorship in US academic institutions surrounding the Israeli assault, with examples including the recent ouster of Harvard University president Claudine Gay and University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill. When asked how teachers might wage a struggle against their conditions at home and crimes by their government abroad, Mona said the following:

“The charge that pro-Palestinian speech is ‘antisemitism’ is a farce. This is not about religion. It’s about the fact that a genocide is being carried out against an entire people.

“It’s tricky because no teacher wants to lose their job, but they are very afraid to speak out. But the reality is, how much more can they throw at us? Kids deserve to know the truth in the classroom. It’s an injustice to withhold that from them. So, if by doing your job, it causes you to lose your job, nobody really has any choice, do they?”

“I’m not familiar with the role of the trade unions in US foreign policy, but I know from experience that the unions have failed the profession of teaching as a whole. I’m now resigning from the teaching profession because it’s not sustainable anymore. It has become impossibly difficult.

“But if teachers were to strike, we could make a huge impact. We could change the profession for the better, and specifically to the issue of Gaza, a general strike by teachers could force the government to call for a ceasefire. I’m a proponent of the idea of teachers forcefully saying, ‘we will not work under these conditions, and we will not cooperate until a ceasefire is called.’

“Teachers have a lot of power. We have a lot of say. But we have been prevented from voicing that power,

and we are not allowed to wield that power, because we are under so much stress, and we have very little time. I believe that the unions should be doing something for us, but they are not.

“I feel ambivalent, because while I support unionism, the unions are completely corrupt. They are in bed with the profit system. I agree that what workers need is for the whole system to be done away with.

“Protesting is important, and I like to come to demonstrations like this to show my support, but I also like to get involved in organizing outside of protests.

“I consider myself anti-capitalist, but I’m not sure I would consider myself a socialist—I lean more toward communism. I used to consider myself a socialist because I only had interactions with the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA). I’m not a fan of the DSA because they seem to be attempting to reform the system, and that is not what I feel is the solution. So I have stopped identifying with that.

“In fact, that was why I had voted for Joe Biden. I was told that if we just keep voting, things will change. But they have not. I agree that the DSA is completely dominated by the Democratic Party, and they’re in place to give the illusion that the system can change from within.

“I’m a scientist and an environmentalist. I believe that if not stopped, capitalism will destroy the planet. So I will align myself with any group which wages a genuine struggle to build solidarity among the working class and overthrow capitalism.”



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact