

Solidarity action urgently needed

Socialist MEP among Gaza peace activists kidnapped by IDF

CWI reporters

On 4 November, Socialist Party Ireland MEP, Paul Murphy, was detained by the Israeli Defence Forces, along with other activists from the Freedom Waves Flotilla.

The flotilla - the Irish ship, MV Saoirse, and the Canadian ship, the Tahrir - attempted to travel to Gaza in solidarity with the suffering Palestinian people and to deliver humanitarian aid.

The Israeli Navy deployed a high-powered water cannon against the deck of the Saoirse.

The protesters were taken into the custody of the Israeli police and the immigration authorities charged them with the "crime" of entering Israel "illegally". In fact, they were kidnapped in international waters on their way to Gaza.

Paul Murphy MEP was able to make a three minute phone call from Givon prison, in Israel (which the prison authorities listened in to).

Paul gave a vivid account of the ill treatment he and his fellow prisoners endured: "Our boat was almost sunk by the manner in which it was approached and boarded by the Israeli navy. People were shackled and deprived of all personal belongings.

"In Givon prison, the authorities tried to disorientate us through sleep deprivation and the removal of our watches and the prison clock recording the wrong time. We have been given no time frame as to how

long we will be kept here before the deportation trial. We were denied our right by Israeli law to contact our families within 24 hours of our arrest.

"On the basis of protest action we have engaged in, our treatment has improved and we have had books and writing materials returned to us.

"We remain defiant and unabashed in our mission, which again has served to expose the criminal nature of the Israeli state in its blockading of Gaza from those of us who wish to provide aid in order to alleviate the poverty and suffering the people there endure."

Solidarity protests

CWI supporters in Israel are campaigning for the release of Paul and all those detained, including holding protests in Tel-Aviv and Haifa. They protested on Monday 7 November, which coincided with a general strike across the country (see below).

Also on Monday the Irish Ship to Gaza Campaign demonstrated outside the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin.

The CWI (the socialist international organisation to which the Socialist Party is affiliated) appeals to readers to immediately protest to Israeli embassies/consulates in your country or to the nearest Israeli embassy/consulate, demanding the immediate release of Paul Murphy and all other activists from the Saoirse and Tahrir.

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Stop press:

As the Socialist goes to print we have heard that Paul and the other protesters have been sent back to prison. Their lawyer argues that this is a politically motivated attack. The protesters have been receiving further rough treatment with reports of the use of taser guns on prisoners and strip-searching.

A protest will be called on Wednesday 9 November at the Israeli embassy in London to demand their immediate release with further action to follow if they continue to be detained.

See socialistworld.net for updates.

Protests should be sent to the London Embassy of Israel - 020 7557 9500 and to the following:

Attorney General at the Ministry of Justice 00 97226466521/2

Fax 00 97226467001

Ministry of Defence PR dept. 00 97236975540 or 00 97236975423 email pniot@mod.gov.il

Israel: General strike over job security

Judy Beishon

A general strike took place in Israel on Monday 7 November, with workers in the civil service, public transport, universities, airports, sea ports and local authorities among those striking.

The strike was called by the Histadrut trade union federation, to demand a reduction in the number of public sector workers that are employed by agencies rather than directly by the state and an increase in their wages and benefits.

About 20% of public sector workers are 'employed' in this way, on worse pay, terms and conditions than permanent employees. Many don't qualify for social benefits and have no job security. The Histadrut has called for tens of thousands of agency workers to be transferred to direct employment.

An increased number of workers on short-term contracts with few

rights is common across the globe as part of governmental austerity drives.

With 300,000 contract workers, Israel is said to have the highest percentage of the workforce employed in this way among the OECD countries, with up to 10% across the entire workforce, compared with the OECD average of about 1.5%. It is becoming endemic in all sectors, not just in the food, security and cleaning industries but in education, health and other areas too.

Some concessions were made by the government following trade union pressure, including a little improvement in wages and rights of agency workers, but they were not offering enough for the strike to be called off.

This strike shows a high degree of solidarity between permanent and temporary workers in Israel and an understanding that the bosses will use the differences to undermine the wages, conditions and rights of

all workers. However, disgracefully, the Israeli Labour Court limited the strike to just four hours, 6am to 10am, a turn of events that was probably no surprise to Histadrut leader Ofer Eini who had said: "The strike will be unlimited and only a court injunction could prevent it".

The Histadrut leaders have a long history of failing to support workers' struggles and there has been speculation in the Israeli press that they have only presented a radical face in this battle in order to regain some standing in the workers' movement following the spontaneous, unprecedented 'tent city' movement of recent months.

Also, reports of the negotiations with the government over recent years suggest that an eventual deal over agency workers could include the Histadrut agreeing to more 'management flexibility' with the 'newer' workers to be employed in the public sector, making it easier to relocate or fire them.

Despite the role played by the Histadrut leaders, there have been many strikes and struggles in Israel this year, including by social workers, rail workers, civilian police workers and a six-month strike at Haifa Chemicals.

In many cases there has been anger towards the union leaders and in the Haifa Chemicals dispute - which eventually won important concessions - the strike leaders switched their allegiance early on to the relatively new union organisation 'Power to the Workers' that has been willing to put up a fight in workers' interests.

Housing slump

The ever deepening housing crisis has been revealed by the latest new build figures. They show that the number of new homes built in 2010/11 in England has slumped to 121,200 - the lowest number since 1923 and 6% down on last year.

London saw the biggest decrease of new homes, with a 27% fall on the previous year. Meanwhile there was an increase in the number of mobile homes and 'temporary dwellings'.

The failure of the Con-Dem government, and the previous Labour government, to invest in publicly owned social housing and instead to largely rely on private property developers to meet housing needs, is apparent to all.

The credit crunch has also seen banks restricting borrowing to first time home buyers. Many young people have now zero prospects of owning a home and instead are compelled to remain domiciled at their parents' home.

In the private rented accommodation sector the imposition of benefit caps will increase evictions and reduce the availability of accommodation. And the caps have not led instead to a decrease in rents by landlords as previously predicted by government minister Iain Duncan Smith, as rents have increased to record highs.

Fast news

Bonus bonanza

RBS, the bank that became synonymous with greedy speculative bankers (Fred 'the shred' Goodwin), huge corporate losses and publicly funded bailouts, has once again rewarded its top investment bankers with a £500 million pay and bonus pot. This sum works out at one million pounds for each fat cat and comes on top of a similar payout last year when RBS recorded a £1.1 billion loss.

It's heart-warming that the bank has sensitively shown its appreciation of a bottomless public purse in these hard times!

No legacy

Back in July, Olympic officials and tourism chiefs were boasting that the multi-billion pound London 2012 Olympic games would be a major boost for the tourism industry.

However, the European Tourism Operators Association expects a 30% fall in visitors in the month before the games, and this decline possibly lasting months or years. But there are some winners, most notably sponsors like BP, recently granted a government licence for deepwater drilling operations in the North Sea, and EDF, which has just ramped up its gas and electricity prices by an average of 10%.

Fracking crazy

The environmentally dangerous 'fracking' method of energy companies to extract gas deposits from underground shale rock, has not stopped the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency from granting licences to energy companies to use this method in Scotland.

It comes only days after an independent report concluded that two earthquakes in the Blackpool area in April and May were almost certainly caused by fracking, and that drilling the well by Cuadrilla Resources had resulted in a further 48 smaller tremors this year. Moreover, the state of Oklahoma in the USA is investigating whether a 20-fold+ jump in the number of earthquakes in the past two years is connected to an increase in fracking there.

According to a seismologist at the Oklahoma Geological Survey the number of earthquakes recorded in the state soared from its average of about 50 a year to 1,047 last year and is likely to match or break that record this year.

Friends like this

The Israeli state is notorious for recently brutalising peaceful Gaza freedom flotilla protesters, sanctioning new settler land grabs in the Palestinian West Bank, and impoverishing its population. And now the Israeli ambassador to the UN has been seen cosy-ing up to extreme far-right politicians. Ron Prosor, the Israeli diplomat, was pictured chatting to Marine Le Pen the leader of France's racist National Front (FN) party. Le Pen described their conversation as "warm".

Most Israelis will be appalled by this. After all Marine's father and former leader of the FN, Jean-Marie Le Pen, said that the Nazi gas chambers were merely a "point of detail of the history of the Second World War".

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