

Criticism of Israel picks up steam

by Pete Brown, *Detroit Workers' Voice*

The critique of Israel as a warmongering savage is picking up steam. Street demonstrations have continued, and they are putting pressure on local governments and trade unions in the U.S. The widespread support for an immediate ceasefire undermines President Joe Biden's re-election campaign, since Biden continues with military aid and secret sales of military hardware to Israel. The demonstrations demanding "ceasefire now!" are showing their power, though there are different trends among those in the demonstrations. Eventually this will lead to a deeper condemnation of Israel's aggression and its imperialist backers.

International condemnation of Israel

Internationally, the U.S. is increasingly isolated in its support for Israel's murderous assault on Gaza. On February 18, another demonstration of tens of thousands took place in London. (1) Protesters there marched on the Israeli embassy and denounced the Labour Party leadership as well as the ruling Conservative Party for their support for Israel. Two days later the Labour Party leadership voted to change its position and call for an immediate ceasefire, separating itself from the Conservatives. Meanwhile, the governments of Australia, New Zealand and Canada called for an immediate ceasefire. In the latest UN Security Council vote for a ceasefire, Britain abstained, while every other country voted for the resolution -- except the U.S., which vetoed it. At the International Court of Justice, 54 nations are lined up ready to give evidence to the court about Israeli genocide in support of South Africa's suit against Israel. 154 nations have voted in the General Assembly for a ceasefire. (2) In the Netherlands, a court recently ruled that the government must stop providing maintenance support for Israeli aircraft, since they are likely used in the violation of international humanitarian conventions. (3)

Not everyone calling for a ceasefire supports "from the river to the sea, Palestine shall be free." Some of these same governments support the existence of Israel as a theocratic Jewish state and support Israel's right to defend itself; they only think the Netanyahu regime has gone overboard in its killing spree and should be told to desist for the time being. But it indicates the strength of the movement against Israel that in every corner of the globe its campaign in Gaza is being denounced.

Ireland has called for an open-ended ceasefire for months. The government there also calls for an end to the blockade of Gaza, which Israel has maintained for years. And they call for a weapons embargo and sanctions on Israel. (4) The BDS movement recently scored a victory when the government of Norway decided to divest its pension fund money from Israel. Four universities in Norway also chose to divest. (5)

Different governments have their own motives for supporting the call for a ceasefire. Some may be primarily concerned for their own interests in the Middle East, while some may just have been pushed into action by the anger of their own citizens demanding something must be done to stop the slaughter. Even among those demonstrating in the streets there are differences over how best to achieve a ceasefire, which governments and other forces to trust or to ally with. But the mass revulsion at the ongoing slaughter is fueling the growth of the movement, and this is sure to lead to deeper criticism of Israel and its apartheid system. The movement for a ceasefire and in support of the Palestinians is not manifested in huge, monster street demonstrations every week as it did earlier in the conflict. But the movement is alive and spreading.

Demonstrations move into city council chambers

Protests against Israel's war on Gaza continue to pop up all around the U.S., on college campuses and in cities large and small. Protests in New York City – in tunnels, on bridges, and in Times Square – snarl traffic. Weekly demonstrations continue in the Seattle area, where posters and graffiti against the war adorn the city, and young activists hurry to snatch up leaflets from the hands of leftist distributors. Two hundred fifty young activists marched in Hamtramck, Michigan on February 18 chanting "Free, free Palestine" and "Hands off Yemen!" Activists are increasingly showing up at city council meetings demanding their city pass a resolution for an immediate ceasefire. Some 70 cities have passed such resolutions so far. This includes large cities such as Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, and San Francisco. (6) And smaller cities are not isolated from such calls. In Ojai, California, city council meetings have been regularly disrupted by demonstrators who demand that the council take action on a ceasefire resolution. (7)

The movement for a ceasefire has gained strength by its endorsement from large institutions – trade unions and churches. The AFL-CIO, the nation's largest union federation, has now endorsed the call, following the lead of some individual unions such as APWU (postal workers), UAW and SEIU. The AFL-CIO call for a ceasefire is weakened by insisting on a "**negotiated** ceasefire", which means giving Israeli and American political leaders much wiggle room to avoid a real ceasefire. And their resolution itself mentions points to negotiate. For example, they call for a release of all the hostages held by Hamas before a ceasefire can take place. But they don't mention the thousands of Palestinians languishing in Israeli prisons on suspicion of participating in West Bank demonstrations. And their resolution does not mention any hint of cutting off military aid to Israel. Nor is there any mention of possibly withdrawing support from Biden, whom the AFL-CIO has already endorsed for president. (9) SEIU's resolution was a little better, since it insists on "**immediate** ceasefire" and it particularly criticized Israel's "overreaction" to the October 7th attack, and it went on, from calling for a ceasefire, to call for "an end to decades of occupation and blockades and lack of freedom endured by the Palestinian people." (10) This is more concrete than AFL-CIO's words about an eventual "two-states solution", which have been proven empty by the almost-three decades since the Oslo Accords.

Among churches, the traditionally pacifist Quaker church has been particularly active. (8) Now they've been joined in their call for a ceasefire by a major black church, the African Methodist Episcopal church, whose national bishops' council recently denounced Israel's war on Gaza as "mass genocide" and called on the government to cut aid to Israel. (11)

National polls consistently show about two-thirds of Americans support the call for an immediate ceasefire, though Biden has consistently opposed that. His policy is out of whack with the sentiments of a large majority of people in the U.S., though many of those same people express support for Biden. This contradiction will continue to deepen the longer Netanyahu's murderous campaign continues, yet Biden continues to oppose an immediate ceasefire; he says this would interfere with Israel's "right to defend itself", by which he must mean Israel's right to slaughter tens of thousands of Palestinian children, since he's still sending Israel more ammunition to do just that.

Not surprisingly, the call for an immediate ceasefire is particularly strong among Arab-Americans, where support for Biden has sunk by about 90%. This has the Biden election campaign worried, especially about the state of Michigan, where Arab-Americans are a crucial voting bloc. In January, campaign officials went to Michigan to try and meet with Arab-American leaders, but they were rebuffed. The mayors of Dearborn and Dearborn Heights refused to meet with them. In February the Biden team tried again, this time sending actual policy advisers from the White House. On February 8, these advisers met with local Arab-American politicians, who told them there must be a permanent ceasefire, restrictions on military aid to Israel, a renewal of financial aid to UNRWA, and a commitment to rebuilding Gaza. (12)

Biden's advisers made no promises, only uttered excuses about Biden's policy suffering from "weak messaging". In the primary election weeks later, Arab-Americans and others launched a "vote uncommitted" campaign for the Democratic primary. This resulted in over 100,000 people voting "uncommitted" instead of endorsing Joe Biden for reelection. This is a nice comeuppance to Biden's Mideast policy.

"Genocide Joe" – and Donald, Brian, Andy, etc.

In the past, Israel has enjoyed almost universal support from the American government and its two major parties, Democrat and Republican. The U.S. has been Israel's most reliable backer at the UN as well as chief ammunition supplier. And now Biden is supporting a bill to provide \$14 billion in military aid to Israel, to replace the ammunition used against Gaza. (This will likely pass in Congress, since the Republican House passed a similar bill in November, though that bill later died in the Democratic Senate). (13) But cracks are appearing in that support, especially among Democrats. Republican politicians remain united in support of Israel, no matter what horrors it rains down on Gaza. Early in the Republican presidential debates, candidates were asked what they felt about Israel's pending attack on Gaza. All the candidates – including Nikki Haley -- agreed with Chris Christie's advice to Israeli prime minister Netanyahu: "Go get 'em!" No qualifying remarks, no moderation was expressed, just unanimous enthusiasm for an invasion everyone knew would wreak devastation on the residents of Gaza.

Since then, some Republicans have grown even more enthused for the slaughter. Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL) wears an Israeli IDF uniform to Congress and has repeatedly claimed there is no such thing as innocent Palestinian civilians or children. His attitude toward Palestinian children is simple hatred: "They're all antisemites." Rep. Andy Ogles (R-TN) was confronted by a peace activist who showed him pictures of dead Palestinian children; his response was "Kill them all!" (14) Such statements have not elicited any calls for censure from congressional leaders, though they were quick to pounce on Rep. Rashida Tlaib's (D-MI) statements in support of Palestinian liberation, to condemn her as antisemitic and censure her.

The Republican Party's leader, Donald Trump, tries to incorporate the Gaza war into his ongoing campaign to "build the wall" against immigrants. He's been warning crowds at his campaign rallies that the war in Gaza could result in many, many refugees from Gaza pouring across the Mexican border, and that some of them will likely be terrorists. This is a pretty crazy idea, since refugees from Gaza trying to escape Israeli bombing find it impossible to cross the border into Egypt, much less cross North Africa and the Atlantic Ocean. Nonetheless, Trump promises to fortify the border and renew his ban on Muslims if he's elected president again. (15) No doubt Trump would carry on the bipartisan tradition of support for Israel, since as president, in 2017, he moved the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which gladdened the hearts of right-wing Israelis. Trump also gave his approval to expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which are illegal according to the UN. More recently, Trump has addressed the war directly and called on Netanyahu to "finish the job" in Gaza and denounced Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer for issuing some criticism of Netanyahu's handling of the war. Trump's only criticism of Israel is that in the past some Israeli administrations have had friendly relations with American Democratic Party administrations. (16)

Republican Party reactionaries are also active trying to suppress any support for Palestinians in the nation's schools and colleges. Teachers and professors are being warned against holding open discussion of the issues in this Gaza war, and the U.S. House held an inquisition of three university presidents for not coming down hard on pro-Palestinian students. Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-PA) spearheaded the attack that led to the resignation of two of the presidents. Other universities have banned pro-ceasefire student organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace and If Not Now from campus. This campaign of suppression is actually not new; it's been in full swing since the rise of the BDS movement among college

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13. Bryant Harris, "House passes Israel military aid bill". *Defense News*, November 2, 2023.
[House passes Israel military aid bill \(defensenews.com\)](#)
14. Sharon Zhang, "Republican House Rep. on Gaza: 'We Should Kill Them All'. Rep. Andy Ogles made the remark in response to an advocate who brought up Israeli forces killing Palestinian children." *Truthout*, February 21, 2024.
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www.comunistvoice.org

email: mail@communistvoice.org