

Massacre in Gaza

Genny Bove

With all the media coverage, it might seem superfluous to write here about the atrocities being committed by Israel in Gaza, but I thought it was perhaps worth including a couple of views of the sort that are not widely covered in the mainstream - certainly not in BBC reporting - along with a round-up of some of the solidarity actions which have been taking place across Britain.

Even the BBC managed to report, albeit in a rather sceptical tone, the illegal attack by Israeli warships on *the Dignity*, a boat carrying humanitarian aid in the form of urgently needed medical supplies and medics to Gaza, which was damaged and forced to dock in Lebanon on 30 December. However, the day before, an uncritical article on the BBC website noted White House support (by both Bush and Obama) for Israel's actions. The report is entitled 'US tacitly backs Israel offensive' and this 'tacit support' is mentioned again in the introductory paragraph although it's hard to see why, since the article itself is full of quotes by White House officials and Obama's team on the subject. 'Openly backs Israel' would be more accurate.

Several minutes on the Radio 4 Today programme this morning were given over to an Israeli settler talking about how scary it was living in fear of rocket attacks from Gaza and how she supported anything which would stop this. No mention was made of the fact that the settler was living on illegally occupied land. The presenter followed this report with a statement that Hamas had been asked to come on the programme but no one was available, as if a Hamas representative would be the natural choice to give the report 'balance'. Surely it would have been possible to interview a Palestinian civilian about his or her experiences of Gaza under siege, of the Israeli air attacks, of hospitals with desperately inadequate facilities and no medicines?

There are all sorts of ways in which the Israel-Palestine conflict is misrepresented in the media; many of these are examined by Greg Philo and Mike Berry of the Glasgow University Media Group in the excellent book *Bad News from Israel* (Pluto Press, 2004).

Not new news

Ali Hasan Abunimah, co-founder of www.electronicintifada.net - the Electronic Intifada - writing in *The*

Guardian on 27 December, describes how the latest bombing of Gaza by Israel is simply the continuation of a long campaign of violence waged on Palestinian civilians:

[T]he bombs dropped on Gaza are only a variation in Israel's method of killing Palestinians. In recent months they died mostly silent deaths, the elderly and sick especially, deprived of food, cancer treatments and other medicines by an Israeli blockade that targeted 1.5 million people - mostly refugees and children - caged into the Gaza Strip. The orders of Ehud Barak, the Israeli defence minister, to hold back medicine were just as lethal and illegal as those to send in the warplanes.

Ehud Olmert, Israel's prime minister, pleaded that Israel wanted "quiet" - a continuation of the truce - while Hamas chose "terror", forcing him to act. But what is Israel's idea of a truce? It is very simple: Palestinians have the right to remain silent while Israel starves them, kills them and continues to violently colonise their land...

With governments and international institutions failing to do their jobs, the Palestinian Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions National Committee - representing hundreds of organisations - has renewed its call on international civil society to intensify its support for the sanctions campaign modelled on the successful anti-apartheid movement.

Reporter on the ground

Ewa Jasiewicz, an experienced journalist, solidarity worker, community and union organiser, is currently working in Gaza for the *Free Gaza Movement*. Here, she reports from the ground on the effects of the Israeli attacks. You can read the full article at www.palestinechronicle.com.

[A]s Israeli Occupation Forces Chief of Staff, Lieutenant-General Gabi Ashkenaz, said this morning, 'This is only the beginning'. But this isn't the

beginning; this is an ongoing policy of collective punishment and killing with impunity practised by Israel for decades. It has seen its most intensified level today... People are all asking, 'If this is only the beginning, what will the end look like?'



Young victims of the attacks on Gaza

Myself and Alberto Acre, a Spanish journalist, had been in the border village of Sirej near Khan Younis in the south of the strip. We had driven there at 8 am with the mobile clinic of the Union of Palestinian Relief Committees. The clinic regularly visits exposed, frequently raided villages far from medical facilities. We had been interviewing residents about conditions on the border. Stories of olive groves and orange groves, family farmland bulldozed to make way for a clear line of sight for Israeli occupation force watch towers and border guards. Israeli attacks were frequent. Indiscriminate fire and shelling spraying homes and land on the front line of the south-eastern border. One elderly farmer showed us the grave-size ditch he had dug to climb into when Israeli soldiers would shoot into his fields...

I was waiting for Alberto to return when ground-shaking thuds tilted us off our feet. This was the sound of surface to air missiles and F16 bombs slamming into the police stations, and army bases of the Hamas authority

The world is waking up

here. In Gaza City, in Diere Balah, Rafah, Khan Younis, Beit Hanoon. We zoomed out of the village in our ambulance, and onto the main road to Gaza City, before jumping out to film the smouldering remains of a police station in Diere Balah, near Khan Younis... Eyewitnesses said two Israeli missiles had destroyed the station. One had soared through a children's playground and a busy fruit and vegetable market before impacting on its target.

There was blood on a broken plastic yellow slide, and a crippled, dead donkey with an upturned vegetable cart beside it. Aubergines and splattered blood covered the ground. A man began to explain in broken English what had happened. 'It was full here, full, three people dead, many many injured'. An elderly man with a white kuffiyeh around his head threw his hands down to his blood drenched trousers. 'Look! Look at this! Shame on all governments. Shame on Israel. Look how they kills us; they are killing us and what does the world do? Where is the world? Where are they? We are being killed here. Hell upon them!'...

A light

There is a saying here in Gaza – we spoke about it, jokily, last night. 'At the end of the tunnel...there is another tunnel'. Not so funny when you consider that Gaza is being kept alive through the smuggling of food, fuel and medicine through an exploitative industry of over 1,000 tunnels running from Egypt to Rafah in the South. On average 1-2 people die every week in the tunnels. Some embark on a humiliating crawl to get their education, see their families, to find work, on their hands and knees. Other [tunnels] are reportedly big enough to drive through. Last night I added a new ending to the saying. 'At the end of the tunnel, there is another tunnel and then a power cut'. Today, there's nothing to make a joke about. As bombs continue to blast buildings around us, jarring the children in this house from their fitful sleep, the saying could take on another twist. After today's killing of over 200, is it that at the end of the tunnel, there is another tunnel, and then a grave?' or a wall of international governmental complicity and silence?

There is a light... of conscience turned into activism by people all over the world. We can turn a spotlight onto Israel's crimes against humanity and the enduring injustice here in Palestine, through coming out onto the streets and pressurising our governments; demanding an end to Israeli apartheid and occupation; broadening our call for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions, and for a genuine Just Peace. Through institutional, governmental and popular means, this can be a light at the end of the Gazan tunnel.

The world is waking up

No matter how blandly or inaccurately the mainstream media reports the atrocities visited by Israel upon Palestine, the world is waking up. Protests and demonstrations against the attacks on Gaza have been taking place all over the world, including in Israel itself, where an estimated 40% of the population opposes Israel's actions.

In Britain, many solidarity actions have already happened and more are being planned.



Hasidic Jews demonstrate outside the Israeli Embassy

At the end of December, there were angry protests outside the Israeli Embassy in Kensington, while demonstrations and vigils were held in towns including Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham, Sheffield and Southampton. Saturday 3 January was a day of action across Britain, with a large march in London, more protests at the Israeli Embassy, and many other demonstrations, vigils and marches around the country. See www.indymedia.org.uk for reports.

Activists have been targeting the BBC on account of its biased and irresponsible reporting. In one particularly effective action, journalists were forced to evacuate the BBC offices in Cardiff as protesters superglued themselves to the entrance barriers. One of the activists said: *While we hear about rockets being fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel, we rarely hear that this is Palestinian land stolen by Israel. Since Saturday, Israel has killed more than 350 civilians in response to the repeatedly reported 4 deaths amongst the Israelis. The hugely disproportionate response by the Israelis is not highlighted.*

In Brighton, where EDO-MBM make electrical components for weapons used by Israel against the Palestinians, protests have been held at the EDO factory, while an ongoing rooftop occupation at Raytheon's Bristol offices has highlighted how Raytheon profits from civilian suffering and death in Gaza and elsewhere. Raytheon is one of the arms manufacturers hoping to profit from training military personnel from around the world in the art of killing civilians with its weaponry if the proposed 'Defence Academy' at St Athan, South Wales, goes ahead. As Jill Gough of CND Cymru succinctly puts it, *the only beneficiaries of military violence are the arms manufacturers and their shareholders.*

The Carmel-Agrexco warehouse in Hayes, Middlesex, has been blockaded many times in recent months, with the company unwilling to prosecute protesters for fear that its complicity in war crimes might be exposed. The company is 50% owned by the Israeli state and much of Carmel-Agrexco's produce is grown and packed on illegal Israeli settlements. The Boycott Israeli Goods campaign has called for demonstrations, blockades and direct action against Carmel-Agrexco on Valentine's day, targeting warehouses, shops and shareholders. For more information see www.bigcampaign.org.

At the very least, we can all check our shopping baskets (particularly fruit, vegetables, herbs and flowers) to make sure that we aren't unwittingly helping to finance Israel's violence.