



Free Palestine march through Vienna

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Report from the spontaneous militant demonstration in Vienna on 1st June

On Tuesday, 1 June, about 2.000 people marched through the city of Vienna in protest against the Israeli murderous attack on the Freedom Flotilla. It was one of the most militant demonstrations in Vienna for many years.

At the beginning we assembled in front of the Israeli embassy, the symbol for the new barbarians, the terrorist Israeli state. The police tried to block the street near the Israeli embassy and built barriers. But we protested against this and after some time we overcame the barriers and took the street. The police understood that given the determination of the protestors they could only push us back with massive force which could have led to a huge riot. Therefore they retreated.

In front of the embassy several speeches were held- including from a Turkish imam, from Leo Gabriel of the European Social Forum and Michael Pröbsting from the League for Socialist Revolution (LSR, Austrian section of the LFI). The LSR speaker stressed the internationalist character of the protests where Turkish, Kurdish, Arabs, Austrians, Muslims, Christians, Jews and Atheists unite to protest against the state terrorist acts of Israel. He also called for a mass boycott campaign against Israel and its economy.

Spontaneous demonstration

There were some discussions between rather moderate leaders from Muslim organisations on one hand and LSR activists and groups of migrant youth on the other hand. While the first wanted to stay at the embassy and dissolve the rally we argued for a spontaneous mass demonstration. The mood of the great majority was clearly in favour of a demonstration so we just did it. We marched in a spontaneous, illegal demonstration from the embassy to the university and ended with a final rally in front of the parliament.

The demonstration had a massive militant, determined character. We shouted 'Israel - Terrorist?', 'Israel ? murder of children?', 'Free, free Palestine?' and the rhythmical slogan which is shouted faster and faster - 'In-ti-fa-da?.'

Police and provocateurs

The police was very defensive and even stopped the traffic to open the streets for us. This was clearly a political decision from the interior ministry. Their alternative was either to repress the demo and to provoke a riot which Vienna has not seen before or to let the people take the street wherever they wanted to go.

At this point the author of this article wants to add a personal remark. I have been a political activist in Austria for 28 years. In this country I never before saw at a progressive political demonstration such a determination, hatred against such an outrageous crime, fanaticism in the best sense of the word.

In two cases pro-Zionist provocateurs put an Israeli flag at a window. This was not a good idea. At the first incident the demonstrators tried to storm the house and threw pieces of concrete at the window. In the second case some pro-Zionist 'Antinationals', who have some influence at the University, put an Israeli flag at the window of the medical faculty. The result was another explosion of indignation. 2000 people assembled in front of the building and threatened to storm it. Windows were smashed, some determined youth did storm the university, tore down the Israeli flag and destroyed it.

The demonstration ended at the parliament where the next activities were announced. In particular all the organisations present call for mass demonstration on Friday, 4th June in the afternoon.

On the composition of the demonstration

The composition of the demonstration was very interesting. 99 per cent of the demonstrators were migrant workers and youth. What was particularly noticeable was the participation of very young, 13, 14, 15 year old migrants. These protests are to a certain degree a catalyst for all the frustration which has been build up for years by day-to-day experience of oppression as migrants and youth. Also a huge number of the protests were migrant women.

Most demonstrators are Turkish migrants who form a huge part of the massive migrant community in Vienna (about 44 per cent of the population are now migrants of the first, second or third generation) Naturally there was a strong Muslim influence at amongst the demonstrators which expressed itself in repeated shouting of 'Allahu Akbar'. There is also a strong feeling of Turkish nationalism expressed in the many Turkish flags - no surprise given that most of the solidarity activists killed and injured on the Mavi Marvara, the main ship of the flotilla, were Turkish

All this is not surprising since the reformist dominated workers movement in Austria never seriously engaged for the interest of the migrant workers and therefore failed to integrate them. Worse the social democratic party, the SPÖ, and their trade union leaders always called for restrictions on the entry of migrant workers. Now several of them even call for legal banning of the burka. In short it is not surprising that social-imperialist forces fail to integrate Muslims into the workers movement. Therefore many migrants feel that only Muslim organisations support them.

The shameful role of the reformist-led workers movement is also visible now. Most of the reformist and centrists did not even turn up at these demonstrations until now or like some pseudo-Marxist, groups sent a few people to sell the paper. Only the IST group and the AIK were present with a banner. Generally speaking the Austrian left and workers movement ignore such mass protests and therefore does not help to counter the influence of bourgeois Islamist forces.

Intervention of the LSR

We called for the demonstrations both on 31. May and 1st June. We see the demonstration not only as a possibility to sell some papers (as most centrist groups do) but to try to build a mass action. We think that such demonstrations are vital and progressive and this is why we do our best to give it leadership. In this context we collaborate with various groups and leaders from the migrant community and at the same time introduce our ideas in speeches we give and propaganda material we distribute. We think such a kind of intervention is important for revolutionaries instead of reducing 'Marxism' to criticism from the sidelines.

Activists from the LSR and the youth organisation REVOLUTION participated in the demonstration with flags and a banner 'No to occupation ? No to the blockade ? Free Palestine!?' We distributed leaflets in which we explained that Israel is an Apartheid state, that a peaceful solution is only possible with a socialist, bi-national state of Arabs and Jews in Palestine. We called for the workers movement to engage in solidarity activities against the blockade and for a boycott of Israel. We also distributed our Palestine pamphlet and the Turkish translation of the LFI programme.

All in all we look forward to participate in this militant solidarity movement for the freedom of Palestine and to introduce revolutionary, socialist ideas.

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