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زبانهای اروپایی

By Betsey Piette
21.05.2022

From Shireen to Jenin, Justice for Palestine!

Philadelphia



Hundreds fill the streets of Philadelphia, marching for Palestine, May 15. WW Photo: Joe Piette.

A “Philadelphia for Palestine” rally on the 74th anniversary of the Nakba drew hundreds of activists to Center City Philadelphia May 15. Many carried signs featuring pictures of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, murdered by Israeli soldiers May 11 while covering their raid in occupied Jenin. Several people held signs that read: “From Shireen to Jenin, Justice for Palestine!”

The multinational rally and march, hosted by several Palestinian, progressive Jewish and other activist organizations, began in Rittenhouse Square. Speakers included Rabbi Linda Holtzman with Jewish Voice for Peace and Deandra Price from Black Alliance for Peace.

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As the event kicked off, Brice Patterson with Workers World Party started by acknowledging the people who have been martyred in Palestine since the beginning of 2022 saying: “Reading through the lists of names” evokes a “sensation similar to when I hear the endless names of Black and Brown people killed by militarized police in the U.S., many trained by Israeli forces.”

He compared the forced removal of Palestinians by Israeli occupiers to the encroaching impact of gentrifiers on Black, Brown and Indigenous communities in the U.S.

“That we have no right to our own homes, we see mirrored not only in places like Sheikh Jarrah, or recently in Jenin, but literally blocks away in our own neighborhoods like members of the UC Townhomes [in West Philadelphia].”

After briefly blocking traffic in all four directions at the intersection of Walnut and 18th Streets, the march proceeded down Chestnut Street toward City Hall. Along the way, people passing by expressed solidarity, with many joining in. A popular chant was “There is only one solution, Intifada, revolution!”

Among those marching was an activist wearing a large puppet of Handala, the Palestinian defiance symbol, created with assistance from Spiral Q Puppet Theatre. The structure stood out above the crowd.

As the march approached the intersection at 15th Street, it was joined by several carloads and two sound trucks of protesters, many carrying large Palestinian flags. They had been unable to reach the starting location due to traffic snarls. The momentum as dozens more demonstrators joined the march was palpable. Suddenly the march, which had occupied both traffic lanes, expanded to occupy sidewalks on both sides of the lanes.

The high level of energy continued as the caravan turned onto South Broad Street, stopping for a brief street rally. As the march circled City Hall, dozens more people leaped over low fences to join the street event.

The march concluded at City Hall with a rally that continued to occupy the streets, blocking traffic for another hour. Internationally renowned Palestinian author Susan Abulhawa was the first to address the crowd. She described Palestine, prior to the Nakba,

as a place where “people of all religions lived together. It was multiethnic for over thousands of years, including people from every society.

“Palestine welcomed people from all over the world — Iraqis, Greeks and others — added to the rich tapestry of Palestine. When Israelis arrived, they weaponized this welcoming hospitality, instructing their people to befriend the Palestinians to gather intelligence. They used this knowledge to attack Palestinians and drive them from their villages.

“They planted bombs in orange trucks at markets and blew people up. They visited village after village where Palestinians lived, shot them and took over their homes and lands. The Zionists created 13 forced labor camps in 1948. This is our Nakba and why generation after generation we have not stopped fighting, even as they are still forcing us out of our homes.

“The video of when Israeli soldiers attacked the mourners at Shireen Abu Akleh’s funeral is very instructive, showing their unfathomable hatred when they attacked Palestinian mourners carrying her coffin, brutally beating people with batons. But when one person succumbed to the beating, another stepped up to hold the coffin.

“That is who Palestinians are. We will never give in or give up. We are the people of the land. We never left there. Our ancestors are buried there. From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

Workers World 19.05.2022