Interview with United for Palestine in Cyprus: We will not stop protesting for the liberation of Palestine (Interview)

Historical Note

This interview with United for Palestine was published on 07/01/24 on the website of 'Internationalist Standpoint'. The interview was carried out by members of the New Internationalist Left.

Content

Interview with United for Palestine in Cyprus: We will not stop protesting for the liberation of Palestine

Since October 7th, 12 protests in solidarity with Palestine have been organized in Cyprus, taking place in both Nicosia and Limassol. Notably, even during the Christmas and New Year holidays, United for Palestine, the group formed after the initial demonstrations and a key organizer of subsequent events, held a speak-out session outside the US embassy and staged a demonstration on December 30th. The momentum continues, with planned protests scheduled every weekend until the end of January. NEDA reporters recently conducted an interview with Nick Brown, an organizer from United for Palestine.

We see that in Cyprus the movement in solidarity with the people of Palestine is very active. Every week we see at least one action organised in one of the cities. What do you think of this movement?

NB: Across the globe millions of people have been shocked at the scale of barbarity carried out by Israel’s military in Gaza. Whilst those in the Arab world and long-term Palestine solidarity activists in the West are in some ways not surprised – a nerve has clearly been touched amongst broad masses of people outside the Arab world. Mobilisations of millions of people have marked a historic step forward for international Palestine solidarity. Israel’s image as the ‘only democracy in the Middle East’ has been significantly tarnished, to the extent that large and disruptive protests have been organised by jews in the United States.

Cyprus has been no exception to this. We have seen some of the largest protests for Palestine in many decades. Chants in Greek, English and Arabic have been ringing through the streets of Nicosia, Larnaca and Limassol almost every weekend since October 7th. This is an issue that has brought together many different sections of the community including of course Palestinians, Greek and Turkish speaking Cypriots, Syrians, Lebanese and many other international folk. People are angry, defiant, and importantly hungry for more action.

The movement, although not on the scale as the larger countries, has introduced many new people into activism and leading protests and actions. It is the combination of this anger and leadership by these activists and the established left which has allowed the momentum to continue and will be vital

for keeping the fight up in the coming year.

The Republic of Cyprus, even though historically had very close and friendly relationship with Palestine, after October 7th raised the Israeli flag on state buildings, and gave unconditional support to the Israeli siege of Gaza. How do you comment on this?

NB: Despite historic associations between The Republic of Cyprus and the struggle for Palestinian nationhood, the state here has demonstrated its advocacy and support for Israel and its colonial project.

This was not stimulated in response to the attack on Israeli civilians by Hamas on 7th October last year but has been a growing relationship over the last decade due to The Republic of Cyprus' political position within the EU and economic role as an independent regional player.

The European Union is a staunchly Zionist institution, it along with its member states benefit from Israel's critical role in securing Western imperial and economic interests in the region. The British Empire were the first to understand this through their assistance setting up Israel throughout the first Nakba in 1948 and similarly the United States has provided billions in support since Israel waged its war against Egypt in 1967 refusing Arab control over key assets like the Suez Canal. European capitalism has significantly gained from this set up and is why, despite the crocodile tears of European leaders over dead Gazan children, they continue to support Israel systematically.

As The Republic of Cyprus has integrated itself into this network of international relations within Europe it has also integrated pro-Israel ideology into its foreign affairs policy. However, the state has not just passively absorbed this ideology, but has an independent interest in defending Israel as a key economic player in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In recent years surveying has revealed natural gas fields off the coast of the Levant leading to intensified regional imperial tensions including Cyprus and Israel, but importantly also Turkey. Cooperation with Israel, perhaps, is seen by the Cypriot state as way to enrich local capital whilst side lining Turkey. For this reason, it has become increasingly in the interest of Greek Cypriot capital to align with Israel. This cooperation has had expressed itself in the military sphere with increased joint exercises between Greece, Cyprus and Israel in recent years. Some of these exercises have included IDF troops practicing the sort of manoeuvres they are currently carrying out in Gaza on Cypriot soil.

The recent vote in the UN general assembly which saw The Republic of Cyprus vote for ceasefire should be taken with a grain of salt. States like Australia had a similar switch but have been clear they still support Israel's right to defend itself and do not challenge the apartheid circumstances within Israel or the increasing violence and expansion of Jewish Israeli settlement in the West Bank. This is nothing but window dressing and a defensive move in response to the scale of opposition within their own countries – it is a desperate attempt to hold on to the visage of human rights advocacy which their initial support for Israel's genocide revealed to be an absolute falsity.

Tell us a bit about United for Palestine, how did it start and how does it work?

NB: United for Palestine was initiated by myself and a few others, in the spirit of the immense momentum of the global Palestine solidarity movement. We wanted to help coordinate continued action in the form of mass protests, speak out actions, leafleting and BDS. Originally it was actually called Students for Palestine, however, after a few meetings which grew from a handful of students to about 15 people who were not only students, we broadened out. However, we continue to get new faces and have built up a larger organising network for those who cannot meet weekly.

Our key role has been to mobilise people in the streets and have a weekly visible presence for

Palestine in at least one of the major cities in The Republic of Cyprus. Having open organising meetings for all those interested both non-aligned and established leftists has allowed the protests to become what they are.

What are your goals/demands/slogans?

NB: The goal from the beginning was to create an organising space that could create ongoing action in solidarity with Palestine, as there was nothing of the type in existence. The campaign has been formed on a very general basis and in direct response to the current crisis. So, most of the demands are about ending the current invasion immediately, ending the blockade of fuel, water and food and ending the limitations on aid through the Rafah crossing. We have made calls for an end to the IDF occupation of the West Bank and an end to apartheid laws within Israeli borders. Significant discussion on what Palestinian liberation would look like and historical and analytical discussions have not been so central as much time has been spent on organisational matters. However, as we continue to bring more people into the movement, naturally there is need to develop our understanding of the current situation and how we got to 7th of October.

In terms of more specific demands, we have called out key BDS targets like HP, Starbucks and McDonalds. But, specific to Cyprus we have aimed much criticism at the current government of Nikos Christodoulides who has been the most pro-Israel president in history. The question of the British bases is also a glaring target for our campaign which we have openly criticised for aiding in the genocide. The UK has two large military bases including naval and air force infrastructure in Akrotiri which has been reported to be facilitating UK and US supply runs to the IDF. Furthermore, there is a huge amount of surveillance and intelligence infrastructure operated by both the UK and US and has been reported to be supplying intelligence to the IDF.

What is the role of the left in this movement?

NB: In my opinion, the left in Cyprus acted far too slowly in response to the initial bombardment of Gaza. It was left up to the Palestinian community in Larnaca to organise the first action. From here left-wing football fans were the next and then finally the Cyprus Peace Council organised a very large demonstration but after several weeks. United for Palestine was initiated to compensate for the delays and gaps in response. Socialist organisations and organisations of the radical left should be throwing themselves into what is a historic movement against an historic crime against humanity. This means mobilising networks as frequently as possible to weekly demonstrations but more importantly mobilising those angered by what is happening who are not connected to the left and growing a new layer of activists.

What is the role of the other social formations like the trade unions?

NB: Disruption at the point of production has been a standout escalation of the global campaign in some locations. For example, dock workers in Barcelona and Belgium refused to allow any shipment containing weapons to operate in their ports last November. Workers hold an important social power; in that they make the wheels of capital turn through their labour. Just as they make these wheels turn, they can bring them to a halt through strikes – however this requires committed activists in the workplace to not only argue for striking but also to strike in solidarity with those facing oppression overseas. In Cyprus, workers should play a disruptive role, particularly in the British naval base.

What are the next steps of United for Palestine?

NB: United for Palestine will continue to call actions particularly with regards to the British bases.

Even if the crowds are smaller some weeks, it has been an important step forward to now have a cohered group of Palestine activists in two major cities: Nicosia and Limassol. The genocide has, unfortunately, a terrible long grind a head. Many more atrocities are likely to take place which could stimulate new rounds of mobilisation as the outrage continues. We need to be prepared also, given recent events in the Red Sea, the strike of Hamas leader Saleh al-Arouri and bombing in Kerman, Iran to move into a broader anti-war campaign if this crisis threatens to spill over into a regional conflict. In this case, Cyprus would be at the strategic heart of any US and/or UK interventions. If the last few years has taught us anything – it is to expect the unexpected. The left and all of those who stand for justice and against war must be ready to immediately respond.

What do you think should be the next steps of the movement for Palestine?

NB: The leaders of the western world have no claim to be advocates for human rights and now this is apparent to millions who will not forget the position their leaders took over the murder of over 20,000 people, children killed and maimed for life – a whole society crushed under the Israeli boot with US bombs. The question now is can we transfer this immediate revulsion into an extended campaign for the liberation of Palestine and the smashing of European ties with Israel. It will not be done with one protest or one strike, but only with an ongoing movement that is willing to disrupt business as usual, build mass mobilisation and challenge the authority of the governments and media at home.

* *The Republic of Cyprus has recognised the State of Palestine since 1988, but also voted in favor of the Resolution 67/19 of the UN General Assembly in 2012, where Palestine was granted an observer status (non-member observer State) to the UN and upgraded the status of the Palestinian delegation in Nicosia to an Embassy.*

Needs Greek Translation, Needs Turkish Translation, United for Palestine (Group), Other Material, Decade 2020-2029, 2023, Palestine, Undefined Location

From:
https://movementsarchive.org/ - **Κυπριακό Κινηματικό Αρχείο**
Cyprus Movements Archive
Kıbrıs Sosyal Hareket Arşivi

Permanent link:
https://movementsarchive.org/doku.php?id=en:other:ufp:interview1

Last update: **2025/07/15 13:46**