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Palestinian students and community activists disrupt Olmert speech

By Doug Michel | October 25, 2009
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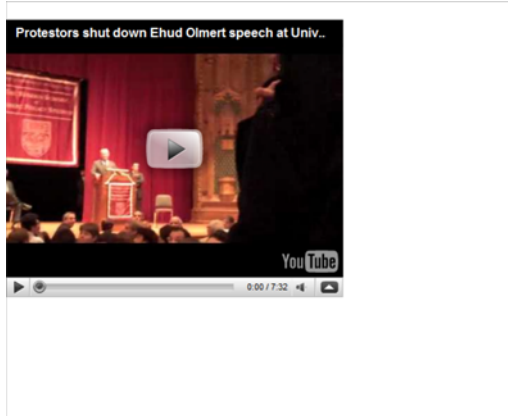
Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was scheduled to speak at the University of Chicago's Harris School of Public Policy about "peace and prosperity" in the Middle East. However, on Oct. 15, over 200 community members, students and Palestine solidarity activists gathered outside of the event, decrying the university for hosting the notorious war criminal. Meanwhile, around 30 activists inside, mainly from Students for Justice in Palestine chapters at the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University, Loyola University and Northwestern University, disrupted Olmert's speech every 20 minutes for two and a half hours.

When the University of Chicago announced the event, Palestinian community groups around Chicago called in to demand that the lecture be cancelled. When this fell on deaf ears, the American Muslims for Palestine and the United States Palestine Community Network sent out a call to mobilize for a big protest. These organizations were joined by the aforementioned student groups and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee as well as solidarity organizations including the International Jewish Anti-Zionist Network, the International Solidarity Movement, the Palestine Solidarity Group, Chicago Coalition Against War and Racism, and Jewish Voice for Peace-Chicago, amongst others.

The protesters inside jeered and yelled at Olmert for his role in the siege on Gaza earlier this year, which killed more than 1400, and the illegal invasion of Lebanon in 2006, which killed over 1200. They condemned the University of Chicago and King Abdullah II of Jordan, who sponsored the speech, for hosting a man who viciously bombed the University of Gaza and other schools. Some unfurled a banner that read "Goldstone" in English and Hebrew, referring to the United Nations report that found Olmert in violation of international law, making him a war criminal, and "possibly [guilty] of crimes against humanity."

In the meantime, the protesters outside chanted loud enough for Olmert and the lecture attendees to hear. Slogans such as "Hey Olmert, you can't hide, we charge you with genocide!", "Free Palestine!", "End Israeli apartheid!" and "End U.S. Aid to Israel!" rang through the air as activists weathered the freezing rain.

"This was the first time the community came out so strongly to the University of Chicago, which is really significant. The event was extremely successful," said Ream Qato, one of the organizers of the disruption of Olmert's address. "He didn't give a speech. That was our goal - not to let him give any coherent thought. The only place he should be allowed to speak is in a courtroom."



<http://www.fightbacknews.org/sites/default/files/chicagoolmert1.JPG>

Above: Hatem Abudayyeh from the Palestine Solidarity Group gives a speech in support of the actions inside the event. (Fight Back! News/Staff)



<http://www.fightbacknews.org/sites/default/files/chicagoolmert2.JPG>



<http://www.fightbacknews.org/sites/default/files/chicagoolmert3.JPG>

Right: Students for Justice in Palestine held a table inside, encouraging students to take action against Olmert.

Left: Over 200 rallied outside the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

The action was so significant that the Arab satellite powerhouse, Aljazeera, sent a camera crew to cover it and broadcast a report across the entire world, over a continuous loop, the next day. An Electronic Intifada video secretly taped inside the venue went viral and Palestinian community activists in San Francisco immediately contacted the Chicago organizers for ideas as to how to replicate the action when Olmert visits their city on Oct. 22. (As this article goes to press, reports from San Francisco state that over 20 people were arrested at the anti-Olmert protest on the Oct. 22.)

As protesters inside the event at the University of Chicago were escorted out of the building after each disruption, police officials took down their student identification. Shortly after the protest, the dean of the Harris School of Public Policy sent out an email to the student protesters, trying to intimidate them from showing dissent. Disciplinary action was not clear.

"Right now the university is trying to instill fear in the students," said Qato. "Students shouldn't fear any ramifications, because they haven't done anything wrong. They have a strong community supporting them."

The Students for Justice in Palestine chapters across the city, with the support of grass-roots Palestinian community organizations and solidarity groups, protested another pro-Zionist event a week later, when over 100 people formed an energetic picket line, chanting "Twenty-five grand a plate, helps to fund a racist state!" at a fundraising dinner for the Friends of the Israeli Defense [Occupation] Forces. University of Illinois at Chicago Students for Justice in Palestine came out in force once again, and these back-to-back actions are only the beginning of a rejuvenated Palestinian student movement in Chicago and beyond.

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[#1 \(/2009/10/25/palestinian-students-and-community-activists-disrupt-olmert-speech#comment-79\)](#)

Doug (/users/doug) wrote 4 weeks 1 day ago

[Big protest in San Francisco! \(/2009/10/25/palestinian-students-and-community-activists-disrupt-olmert-speech#comment-79\)](#)

I had meant to post this earlier, but Olmert is on a speaking tour, I suppose, and ended up in San Francisco to spout more of his lies. Here's a video of the protest: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=491GOKwrN1s>

And here's another good news article with a video from Electronic Intifada about the event: <http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10851.shtml> (<http://electronicintifada.net/v2/article10851.shtml>)

From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free!

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- kim wrote:
Thanks! The house is still boarded and still vacant. The mortgage company had 2 - 24hr...

[RE: STUDENT STRUGGLES CONTINUE ACROSS CALIFORNIA \(/2009/11/21/STUDENT-STRUGGLES-CONTINUE-ACROSS-CALIFORNIA\)](#)

- kim wrote:
WAY TO GO Students! Your fight is very inspiring. We are in a time that we as a people need...
- eric wrote:
41 students were arrested at Wheeler Hall this afternoon. The university refused to...

[RE: UCLA STUDENTS STAGE BUILDING TAKEOVER \(/2009/11/19/UCLA-STUDENTS-STAGE-BUILDING-TAKEOVER\)](#)

- eric wrote:
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