

SOCIALIST UNITY

13 March, 2009

A LIFELINE TO GAZA

Filed under: [Media](#), [Palestine](#) — admin @ 1:18 pm

The following article was written by Guardian journalist Matthew Taylor last weekend, just before the convoy arrived in Gaza. Unfortunately it was not published.



A British aid convoy of 220 vehicles that stretches for three miles is due to reach the border with Gaza today almost a month after setting off from London. The caravan, which organisers say will bring more than £1 million of medical equipment and aid to the Occupied Territories, has made its way across Europe and north Africa and includes a fire engine, two buses and several ambulances.

“It has been an amazing journey and an amazing effort by everyone involved,” said a convoy organiser Rob Hoveman. “As well as getting as much concrete aid to the people of Gaza as we possibly can the it has raised the plight of the people of Gaza both here in the UK and in all the country’s it has passed through.”

Respect MP George Galloway is heading the campaign and announced his plan for the overland trip at the end of a protest march against the Israeli invasion of Gaza

held in London on January 10th. A month later 110 vehicles and 280 volunteers set off carrying a range of goods from medical equipment to toys, clothes and food.

Organisers say the number of vehicles and volunteers has swelled as people joined the convoy along its route. “The reception has been absolutely overwhelming,” said Hoveman. “Not just in north Africa but also in France and Spain. Considering how many borders we have had to cross things have gone incredibly smoothly.”

The border between Algeria and Morocco was opened for the first time in 15 years to allow the convoy through and in Libya Colonel Gaddafi’s regime supplied free fuel and accommodation with scores more vehicles joining the procession.

But the campaign has not passed without controversy. Nine volunteers on their way to London from Manchester for the start of the convoy were arrested under anti-terrorism laws. All nine were released without charge but the publicity led to a 80% slump in donations. “It was undoubtedly our biggest set back,” said Hoveman.

Campaigners say that although many volunteers are British muslims from the north of England the convoy includes people from all sorts of political and religious backgrounds from across the UK. Farid Arada helped organise the Manchester group and said the convoy tapped into a local frustration about the situation in Gaza following the Israeli invasion.

“As a family we had watched in silence a land being grabbed, homes being demolished, children being maimed and orphaned. But this convoy has given us an opportunity to make our voices heard and do something real and constructive to try help those who have suffered so terribly.”

Another volunteer, 70-year-old Jim Porter from Brighton, is a former US marine.

“For years he has cared very much about what is happening there,” said his wife Penny. “He had been getting angrier and angrier and when he heard about the convoy he just said “That is it, I’m going.””

The couple raised enough money to buy a second-hand mini-bus and Jim and a friend filled it with aid - ranging from children’s hearing aid equipment and other medical supplies - to clothes, toys and food. “He just felt like he had to do it,” said Penny. “I have heard from him once or twice but it is difficult to keep in touch. He was fit enough when he set off but I’m not sure what state he will be in after more than three weeks on the road.”

The convoy crossed into Egypt from Libya on Thursday and was due to reach the Gaza border tonight [sat] although a text

message Penny received from her husband yesterday read “Stuck in Egyptian desert.”

“It has been a hard trip, but the positive story here is about ordinary people, whether their are middle class white southerners like us or British muslims from the north, coming together to try and do some good.”

The convoy aims to cross into Gaza at midday tomorrow although organisers are still waiting for final clearance from the Egyptian authorities. They say that even if they are denied access they hope aid agencies will be allowed to take the vehicles - most of which will be left in Gaza - over the border and distribute the aid.

14 Comments »

1. >>>Unfortunately it was not published.

What a disgrace. Can we get an explanation from The Guardian as to why this extraordinary story was unfit for the world's supposedly greatest liberal news source?

Comment by Strategist — 13 March, 2009 @ 2:12 pm

2. Strategist, you could write to the Guardian and complain.

However, please note that the journalist, Matthew Taylor, was happy for the article to be published here, and we wouldn't want to cause trouble for him with his employer.

Comment by [Andy Newman](#) — 13 March, 2009 @ 2:34 pm

3. Over the last few days I have I received many emails from Gaza. Here are two:-

“We Palestinians are completely honoured and overwhelmed with your efforts not to mention your support. And the fact that you have been through a lot on your journey here, makes us feel even more proud and more than just happy.

That our voices and prayers were not lost in the air and we are heard all over the world and specially that we're not alone .

THANK YOU, is not enough to show our real feeling and respect for you all. So welcome to GAZA, and make sure that we all appreciate what you've done and we admire the wonderful work that George Galloway have done to us . So we all want you to consider Gaza as your second home town, that wherever you go you have a home,and where ever you look there is a welcome smile” .

God bless you all .. and THANK YOU . - Amal Murtaja - Gaza - Palestine .

and the second.....

Dear Honourable Mr. George Galloway,

I would like to extend my most sincere congratulations and gratitude for accomplishing the incredible mission of “A Lifeline from Britain to Gaza”. The unprecedented determination, wisdom, perseverance, integrity, strong ethics, incredible courage that you and the team exhibited throughout this long and challenging journey, that extended across three continents, are highly appreciated and greatly valued by all of us, Palestinians and Muslims in particular,and the whole World in general.

I welcome you as a Palestinian brother of mine...I think Mother Palestine is weeping today with joy not sadness, for having such a son, a hero, that along the many, many long years of suffering, refused to forget.... Refused to forget the horrifying suffering, the tremendous pain, the inhumane genocide...Her rape and torture in every way possible...And he kept on going and going...Until justice and defeat of the siege prevailed. Sir, this is not just a victory for Mother Palestine....but rather a victory for all of humanity indeed.

I salute you my friend, for all what you did and continue to do for my people...We cherish you and admire you.... You are in our hearts and minds now and always.

Best regards

Dalal Alhousseini Muhtadi
(Cousin of the late Faisal Alhousseini)

Comment by [Clive Searle](#) — 13 March, 2009 @ 4:04 pm

4. Clive

I hear that some of the aid was blocked at the border, including the fire engine, and around 50 of the volunteers didn't get through either.

Messages to the "Twinning with palestine" e-mail groups say that lots of the non-medical aid and food was unloaded, and not let through, including aid from Islington to Yibna, such as nappies, nappy rash creams, baby feeders, pampers, books, colour pens and paint, sanitary towels, sports shoes for kids and women and football shoes.

Do we know what is going to happen to this aid? If it doesn't get into Gaza where will it go? who has control of it now?

Comment by [Andy Newman](#) — 13 March, 2009 @ [4:17 pm](#)

5. Unfortunately we were unable to get all of the volunteers through despite repeated requests to the Egyptians. It appears that they simply chose an arbitrary figure about how many of the convoys foot supporters would be allowed to enter Gaza. Passengers had their passports checked to see if they had Moroccan stamps - if not they were made to wait. This is the reality of life at the Rafah crossing - many Palestinians can wait for days or weeks to cross - or fail entirely.

Much of the aid was taken into Gaza. Of that which was unloaded by the authorities we are assured that it will be delivered by the Egyptian Red Crescent to the Palestinian Red Crescent. The fire engine sadly will need to go via an Israeli crossing.

The difficulties about getting aid into Gaza, as well as so many of the supporters kind of sums up why Viva Palestina was so important. For if it was so easy to get aid into Gaza we would not have had to organise the convoy in the first place.

Comment by [Clive Searle](#) — 13 March, 2009 @ [5:14 pm](#)

6. I stand four-square behind Israel, our true friends in a region where Anti-Americanism is the real danger. In the light that reveals the Arab lunacy gripping the Middle East today, Israel has proved to be a sane, democratic island surrounded by an ocean of hate and self-destructive mayhem. Fatah, Hamas, Hezbollah and the rest are not credible entities for the world to support. Israel is - and the world media need to abstain from bashing them for protecting their existence.

Comment by [James](#) — 13 March, 2009 @ [10:19 pm](#)

7. I salute the resilience and courage of my Palestinian sisters and brothers in their continued torment which started slowly in 1887. I thank Viva Palestina in acting bravely for millions.

I note the constant ability for denial in comment no 6 but know it wanes.

The 'zio-con' war against Islam for control of hydrocarbon reserves, which includes the gas reserves off Gaza, must be opposed by all legal means. Central in that is the indictment of the leading criminals. Please start by supporting us in bringing this home grown specimen to the bar - the wrong side of - <http://blairfoundation.wordpress.com/>

And this for more information <http://dhalpin.infoaction.org.uk/>

For truth, reason and justice

Comment by [David Halpin](#) — 14 March, 2009 @ [10:05 am](#)

8. #6 April 1st isn't for another three weeks, James

Comment by [Green on Red](#) — 14 March, 2009 @ [10:05 am](#)

9. James: doubtless you would have stood 'four-square' behind the annihilation of native Americans, Australian aboriginals and the slave trade for their civilising effects. And of course don't forget the brutal disappropriation of the peasantry, without that we wouldn't have the oh so modern phenomenon of wage slavery. Piss off to a social imperialist unity site you Zionist, colonialist thief. You think you are civilised? Think again you murdering shit.

Comment by [Lame](#) — 14 March, 2009 @ [11:01 am](#)

10. but the vivapalestina album, corking album to celebrate the fantastic convoy. <http://www.vivapalestina.org/thealbum.htm>

Comment by [jay stewart](#) — 14 March, 2009 @ [12:42 pm](#)

11. Just wondering, are there any Hamas supporters around here? Anyone saluting the courage, strength, and

indefatigability of that bunch of antisemitic terrorist murderers?

Comment by Mikey — 14 March, 2009 @ [12:59 pm](#)

12. I very much like the idea of “Arab lunacy” “gripping the middle east”. It reminds me somewhat of the first General appointed in the occupation government in Iraq, who declared that he wanted to remove Arab nationalism...from Iraq. “That’ll work” I can remember thinking. The general in question had been personally politically close to the Zionist settler movement (one wonders how James would view discussions of specifically *Jewish* lunacy) and since he rapidly ended up in the dustbin of history I’ve forgotten his name.

Comment by johng — 14 March, 2009 @ [1:21 pm](#)

13. Oh Dear friends, it is with great regret that I must announce a sad tragedy. It seems that Tony Greenstein was performing a cornhold on Roland Rance, when Roland had a sudden bout of violent flatulence.

Alas, both comrades were blown to smithereens and are now in the great Gulag of the Sky.

— Mark Elf, Agagite

Comment by markelf2 — 14 March, 2009 @ [7:12 pm](#)

14. This week’s lead story

Hero’s welcome for Galloway!

By our Arab Affairs Correspondent

George Galloway got a hero’s reception when he arrived in Gaza on Monday at the head of a relief convoy laden with supplies from Britain. With open arms the Palestinians welcomed the maverick Respect MP and the convoy teams when the hundred –odd Viva Palestina lorries crossed the Egyptian frontier into the Gaza Strip. As Galloway endlessly repeated : “The people of Gaza are not alone, we are all Palestinians now”.

The food, clothing and medicine they brought to the devastated city was, as Galloway said, a drop in the ocean, but the trip had built a lifeline from Britain to Gaza.

Other aid, including electrical generators and a fire engine is coming via Israel, where the British delegation hoped to get it into Gaza through coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The odyssey began when the convoy hit the road to France from London’s Hyde Park on Valentines Day. Crossing the Channel the lorries drove through Spain to Morocco and then across the whole of Arab north Africa to Egypt. In Cairo they met Galloway for the final leg to Gaza city.

In Gaza city Galloway met Hamas leader Ismail Haniya and handed over £25,000 in cash for emergency relief work. “The money will go to help the long suffering people of Gaza,” said Galloway. “But the most important point is that this is in breach of the EU sanctions regime which has caused so much unnecessary hardship here. There is no jury anywhere in Britain or Europe that would convict me of a crime however. Instead it is the policies of the British and European Union governments that would be convicted.”

The Muslim Brotherhood leader was briefly prime minister of the Palestine National Authority when Hamas won the 2006 elections in the West Bank and Gaza but he was deposed in 2007 by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas when differences between Hamas and Abbas’ Fateh movement led to bloodshed.

Hamas then took over the Gaza Strip and Haniya still claims the premiership. Galloway thinks he’s right and he told cheering crowds in central Gaza that Haniya was the only legitimate elected leader of the Palestinian people. Now the Arab regimes are in crisis, Galloway said, because their people and some of their officials and their officers at border controls all oppose the siege on the people of Palestine.

This is particularly true of Egypt where the Mubarak government collaborates with the Israelis in maintaining the blockade against the Gaza Strip. This week Magdi Hussein, the leader of the suspended Socialist Labour Party, was jailed for two years by a military tribunal for illegally crossing into the Gaza Strip after the recent cease-fire.

His party was founded in 1978 on a socialist platform but it adopted an Islamist programme in 1986 and works with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers. A split in the leadership led to the party’s suspension under Egypt’s draconian electoral laws in 2000.

Magdi Hussein was arrested on 1st February at the Rafah border crossing after spending a week in the Strip to see the destruction wrought by the Israeli war-machine. When he was there he publicly attacked the Mubarak government on

Hamas radio and TV for its insistence on keeping the Rafah crossing closed to both people and badly needed humanitarian aid.

Hussein's been inside before for allegedly libelling ministers and for protesting against Israel and the invasion of Iraq and he remained defiant after his arrest. "People are free to travel from one country to another," Hussein declared. "When did it become a crime to visit our besieged Arab brethren?"

On the Arab street many would agree with him. They saw Arab leaders sit with folded arms while the Palestinians in the Strip battled against all odds to fend off the Israeli army for a month in January. They see Arab princes and presidents pledge billions of dollars in aid for reconstruction that never seems to arrive and they wonder where are the Arab convoys?

Comment by New Worker — 15 March, 2009 @ 9:57 am

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