

Zionism or Arab Nationalism?

No choice in Mid-East

World Revolution

1976

Today (1973) a new imperialist war breaks out in the Middle East and the vicarious social-patriots who constitute today's established "left" can hardly contain themselves in their eagerness to rush to the defence of one bourgeoisie against the other.

A few social-democrats and left-wing Zionists declare their solidarity with "plucky little Israel" against "Arab aggression", ignoring the fact that the state of Israel is fighting a war over conquered territories, over vital raw materials such as the Sinai oil-fields, which now supply almost all of Israel's oil, over Israel's "right" to continue her repression and exploitation of thousands of Arab workers and peasants in the "administered areas".

Needless to say, support for Israel implies support for American imperialism which pours out millions of dollars in arms and aid to ensure that Israel is able to carry on protecting American interests in the Middle East to the best of her abilities, (though, of course, we should not forget the amount of U.S. and Western arms supplied to Arab states such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and the preference shown by U.S. oil and other interests for the "Arab cause").

In order to leap onto the bandwagon of anti-Zionist jihad, the established left must make Zionism past and present the real villain of the piece.

Of course it is true that the organised Zionist movement has discriminated against the native Palestinian population, (expropriation of the fellahs' land, "Jewish labour only", a legally enforced discrimination, etc.), and has always found it necessary to align itself to the dominant imperialism in the area, (Britain, the U.S., etc.).

Needless to say, the Zionist bureaucracy is guilty of many crimes against Arab and Jewish workers. But the attempt to attribute the whole Middle East conflict to the evil will of the Zionists is a very specious form of subjectivism, similar indeed to the ideology of Zionism itself, with its incessant talk of a "miracle in the desert," and the "pioneering spirit which overcomes all obstacles," and so on.

Capitalist reality on the other hand operates in a social system which allows little scope to the "will" of individuals or peoples. As with many other national movements, the history of Zionism is fundamentally a history of many people being dragged along by a tide of reaction, by the terrible impetus of the entire world capitalist system in decadence. The capitalist crises and counter-revolutions which followed the defeat of the proletarian revolution after 1917, caught the Jewish masses in a monstrous trap.

Plight of the Jews

The fascist bourgeoisie of Europe resurrected political anti-Semitism as an invaluable weapon of counter-revolution, and needless to say the "democratic" and "Soviet" bourgeoisie stood by and did nothing to prevent the persecution of-European Jewry; indeed they actively assisted in the massacre by refusing to attack supply-lines to the concentration camps, and so on. In the absence of a socialist alternative, it is hardly surprising that thousands of Jews began to look for a purely nationalist, that is a Zionist, solution to their isolation.

Prior to the revival of anti-Semitism and the simultaneous closing of the borders of America, Britain, etc., to the Jews, Zionism had been on the wane and had been a minority movement among the Jews. The "blame" for the

revival of Zionism has to be taken beyond the will of the Zionist leadership to the decay of the capitalist system itself, and to the horrifying forms of imperialism, racism and dictatorship thrown up in that process. Without that, the cynical manipulations of Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir and company would have had no significance at all.

Moreover, the Zionist state itself could not have been set up except in the wake of an imperialist world war and a re-division of the globe into new spheres of influence, new petty nation states, new markets.

Thus, in 1948 it suited the major imperialist powers, the U.S. and Russia, to support the state of Israel.

The Zionists in Palestine received American help and Russian and Czech arms to defeat the Arab armies, which in turn were supported by the declining imperialism of Britain. Then as now, the villain of the piece is not this or that “people” but the imperialist system itself.

Above all, the critique of Zionism which stresses its historic need to ally itself with imperialism and to defeat the national movement of the Palestinians is entirely vacuous unless it is posed within a general critique of all national movements in the era of imperialism. Since the world has been carved up among the great imperialist ‘centres, so-called national liberation movements as a whole have been forced to fight one imperialism by aligning themselves to another.

This is true not only of Zionism but of Vietnamese, African, Cuban, and innumerable other nationalisms. Palestinian nationalism is no exception. In response to Zionism, the Palestinian leadership from the Mufti to Arafat has aligned itself with any imperialist power which was for one reason or another opposed to Zionism.

The Mufti sought an alliance with German and fascist imperialism, then with British imperialism, (another example of the flexibility of imperialism in this region). The guerrilla organisations operate as material and ideological representatives of Russian and Chinese imperialism, and of the “sub-imperialism” of Arab regimes of different hues—Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and others.

Palestinian Revolutionaries

Like Zionism, the “Palestinian revolution” could only triumph at the expense of its rival nationalism, i.e., of the Israeli Jews. The chronic impotence of the Palestine guerrillas, already manifested in their nihilistic adventures outside the Middle East, was underlined in the recent war, where the commando groups acted as mere appendages of the Arab armies—even fighting on the same side as the very Jordanian brigades which crushed them so ruthlessly in 1971.

It is quite clear that for all the rhetoric of the “Palestinian Peoples War,” the Palestinian national movement could only “liberate Palestine” by tail-ending the state armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq and the others, no doubt heavily backed up by Russian imperialism. Any regime set up by these forces would be a ghastly caricature of “liberation”.

Of necessity it would be a puppet state of different; anti-Western imperialisms, exerting a ruthless dictatorship over the defeated Israeli population and exploiting the labour of both Jewish and Palestinian workers. The sterility of the slogan of the “democratic secular state of Palestine” lies in the fact that a unitary state of Palestine could only be established in the wake of a “holy war” in which even bourgeois democracy would be utterly suppressed.

America plays exactly the same role as Russia in this conflict. It does not fight with American troops, but sends arms to its clients (not only Israel but also Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia). Israel in turn is no more a simple pawn of America than Egypt is of Russia and has often demonstrated its willingness to defy the wishes of its patron.

As with most of the inter-imperialist conflicts since World War II, the Middle East war is fought by proxy by the major imperialist powers. Furthermore, the Middle East conflict has exhibited a pattern integrally related to the decadent phase of capitalism: within the overall context of global imperialism, a host of minor imperialisms emerge competing among each other and for advantages vis-a-vis their big patrons.

Thus, North Vietnam, India and others-are minor imperialist states dominated by the great powers. Similarly, the Israeli regime which has expanded its territories continuously since 1948, which has made inroads into a number of African powers, which sends military advisors to South Vietnam, Latin America and elsewhere, is itself a minor imperialism, as is the Egyptian state which once sought to be head of a United Arab Republic, has armed the Palestine guerrillas and dispatched troops to fight a murderous war in the Yemen.

The war of Israeli and Arab capitalism is an imperialist war even in its own confines.

International Working Class

For us, the perspective which begins from the working class as an international class is the only one which offers any hope to the workers of the Middle East. For while we do not discount the possibility of revolution anywhere, it

may well be that the working class in both Israel and the Arab states has been so well organised under nationalist projects that the possibility of a revolutionary breakthrough beginning in the Middle East, particularly at the time of war, is slim.

This would still not lead us, like the opportunists of the “left”, to a capitulation to the accomplished fact, to policies of tactical alignment with one side or the other. Instead it leads us to emphasize the importance of severing the imperialist arteries in the centers of imperialism, where class divisions are less obscured by national conflicts.

A successful revolution in America, Europe or Russia or China would surely provide an enormous impetus to the workers of the Middle East to transcend their nationalist consciousness and unite against the Arab and the Israeli bourgeoisie. In a world-wide class upheaval, the possibility that Arab and Israeli workers would respond in massive numbers to a call for a fraternisation of troops and an armed class offensive against the bourgeoisie, the nation state and national borders, would be greatly enlarged.

That way is indeed the only way in which the Israeli and Arab workers can escape from a barbaric conclusion to the Middle East conflict. The particular problems of the Middle East, such as the situation of the Palestinian refugees, can likewise only be solved within the context of an international communist victory.

Capitalism has long outlived its ability to solve even its “smaller” problems such as the provision of decent-housing for a growing sector of the population either in the advanced countries or in the “third world”. It is, therefore, entirely unrealistic for revolutionaries to advocate partial or transitional reforms under modern capitalism.

The established left talks-about “realism” while supporting a hopeless, national struggle on the part of the Palestinians. It talks about realism in supporting an Arab military victory when once again the Arab states are heavily defeated by Israel. Such “realism” is in fact nothing more than the perpetuation of the most dangerous illusions.

Global Perspective

For us reality is always a global reality. We begin from the global perspective because that alone can allow us to see the whole picture in relation to every “particular” conflict. For us it is impossible to have a revolutionary position for one part of the working class while maintaining an opportunist one for another, simply because the prospects of the revolutionary struggle in that area are poor at the present time.

For while the class struggle always goes on everywhere, it is impossible to deny that the class struggle in the Middle East has suffered another momentous set-back due to this war: like any national war, the Arab-Israeli war is first and foremost a war against the working class.

But throughout the October (1972) conflict we still took the position of advocating the defeat of both sides, the continuation of class struggle in the armies as well as in the factories, and the revolutionary unification of Arab and Jewish workers. At the present time no tendency in either Israel or the Arab states exists with such positions.

But for us the appearance of such a tendency, however small, among the workers of the Middle East would be a million times more progressive than all the compromises and tactical alignments of the Trotskyists and Maoists and their cohorts in Israel, or of the left-wing of Zionism or liberal Israeli “socialism” which remains loyal to the state of Israel, or of the most “militant” wing of Arab nationalism.

The only way to encourage the emergence of revolutionary tendencies in the Middle East, or in any other area ravaged by imperialism, is for communists working in the centers of imperialism to remain absolutely uncompromising in the adherence to their class positions, to revolutionary defeatism and the solidarity of the workers everywhere.

For revolutionary internationalism is a permanent stance in the imperialist epoch. We advocate it at all times, in the conviction that it will be the banner of millions of armed workers when the real class battles begin.

—from *World Revolution* No. 1, May 1974

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/268-january-1976/zionism-arab-nationalism>
Fifth Estate #268, January, 1976

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