



the
middle east

repression and
revolt

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The imperialists have won the Cold War. But they have yet to fashion the new world order in their image. And it is in the Middle East that they encounter the biggest obstacles. The intifada of the Palestinian people moves into its fourth year, despite Israel's massive round of killings and detentions.

The invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi armed forces introduces a greater measure of instability into a region that was already the powder keg of world politics. The imperialist troop build up has plunged the whole of the Middle East into a major cycle of war and class conflict, pitting Arab against Arab, Palestinians against the Israeli state, and the workers and poor peasants against their rulers.

*Here we publish a 1988 document; **Zionism, Israel, Palestine and Arab nationalism** adopted by the Movement for a Revolutionary Communist International (now League). It is essential reading for those who want a Marxist understanding of the roots and interconnections of the present conflicts.*

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Israel: Refuge or Trap for Jews?

Since its emergence in the late nineteenth century Zionism has been transformed from minority ideology in Europe to a state power in Israel. It has created a state which inevitably denies the Palestinians' right to self-determination. Here we examine the history of the Jewish people, of Zionism and the state of Israel.

The Jews are clearly not a race. The original Hebrew people and language belonged to the Semitic family but two and a half millenia of residence amongst non-Semitic peoples, widespread proselytism to Judaism in earlier periods and intermarriage has made these communities like most other peoples a "racial mixture".

Mass conversions to Judaism of entirely non-Semitic peoples—the Khazars in the Russian Steppes and the Falashas in Ethiopia are the most striking examples. But Jewish communities in the centuries before their medieval and modern persecution regularly proselytized on a similar scale amongst those gentiles performing the same economic functions as themselves.

Only the malign fanatics of anti-Semitism and the extreme far right racist element of the Zionist movement claim that the Jews are a "race apart".

Nor are the Jews a nation. Modern nations are the product of the bourgeois epoch not eternal or millenia-long communities. Bourgeois nationalisms, however, usually claim to be re-founding ancient nations when they are in fact forming a new nation. This is equally true of the Jewish nationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries. That an ancient Hebrew state existed during the first half of the first millenium before the Christian era is incontrovertable. This state—later two states—was however destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

The Hebrew ruling and priestly classes (not the whole people) were transferred to Babylon where their social function and the religious ideology that expressed it underwent a complete transformation. The monotheistic religion of Judaism was born. An exploiting class of priests and merchants developed performing an economic function within the Persian, Macedonian and Roman Empires.

The Diaspora—the scattered Jewish communities of the Mediterranean basin, the fertile crescent and beyond—were not the product of forced exile but of

the functioning of merchant capital. The religious ideology with its myth of the scattered people and its retention of Hebrew as a sacred language served to link these communities.

Priestly rabbinical authorities were allowed to exercise authority over these scattered communities—some quite large as in Egypt and Palestine. After the Babylonian deportation most Jews lived outside Palestine and the majority of the population of Palestine were not Jews (although they were undoubtedly descendants of the old Hebrew peasantry as well as Canaanites, Philistines etc).

The non-assimilation of these communities vaunted as a unique expression of fidelity to nationhood both by orthodox religious Jews and by Zionists is no mystery. There was no world of nations in the ancient and medieval worlds to be assimilated into. The Jewish communities were not atypical or in contradiction with the world in which they performed a vital role. Other "exiled" or minority communities have played analogous roles—Armenians, Copts, Indian and Chinese communities in South East Asia and Africa.

This phenomenon has been analysed most systematically by the Trotskyist Abram Leon in his work *The Jewish Question* published in 1946. He terms this formation a "people-class". The essential axis of the Jewish communities was their functioning as merchant and usurers capital in pre-capitalist modes of production. Around the big merchants and usurers oscillated strata of shipping workers, artisans, caravan traders, peddlers, shopkeepers etc, making up the Jewish community. Jews did move into other trades and occupations but to the extent that they were estranged from money economy they tended to be assimilate not into other "nations" but into other religions.

This analysis explains the longevity of the Jewish communities and the preservation of their religion and sacred language. Leon shows that "It is because

the Jews have preserved themselves as a social class that they have likewise retained several of their religious ethnic and linguistic traits." "Judaism" he maintains "mirrors the interests of a pre-capitalist merchant class".

This people-class constituted a series of self governing communities ruled by scribes and later rabbis who related directly to the gentile rulers. The Law (Torah) and the teachings of the rabbis (Talmud) constituted a basis to link the far flung communities and keep them from dissolving into the peoples surrounding them. However, the flourishing of the communities of the people-class were only compatible with an economy otherwise dominated by subsistence agriculture. Thus the stable conditions of economic life of the Middle East and Mediterranean allowed for the survival into the modern period of these communities. In Europe, however, the middle ages saw the process of the destruction and expulsion of the Jewish communities.

With the development of merchant and then banking capital in the cities of Europe from the 13th to the 15th centuries the Jews were restricted more and more to usury. The simultaneous emergence of debt bondage for the peasants and petty nobility as feudalism began to break down motivated the vicious pogroms and expulsions of the Jews during these centuries.

The German Jews speaking a dialect of Middle High German (Yiddish as it came to be known) moved eastwards into as yet less developed Poland. Here, between the 15th and 17th centuries under the Polish monarchy they flourished, being allowed complete autonomy and self government in their network of small towns (*stetls*).

However economic development caught up with them. Their role as innkeepers, shopkeepers, pawn brokers, but above all as bailiffs of the feudal lords and kings meant that class hatred developed between them and the Ukrainian and Polish peasantry. Thus the great peasant revolts of the 17th and 18th century all saw massacres of the Jews. The dark age of the Eastern European Jews (Ashkenazim) began. At the other end of the continent in 1492 the Spanish monarchy expelled or forcibly converted the old Jewish communities of Spain. Some 150,000 Jews moved into Europe, North Africa and the Ottoman Empire becoming the Sephardic communities where they remained untroubled until the advent of Zionism.

Anti-Semitism and Zionism

The development of industrial capitalism in the 18th and 19th centuries in Western, then Central and last of all in Eastern Europe began the dissolution of the people-class. Class differentiation—into big bourgeois financiers, petit bourgeois trades and proletarians—

led to the rapid assimilation of large numbers of Jews and to the conversion of Judaism into merely one religion amongst others. Jews in Western and Central Europe adopted the culture and national identities of the countries where they lived.

Had the development of capitalism proceeded evenly and in the same way in Eastern Europe then a similar process of the dissolution of the people class would undoubtedly have taken place. But whilst capitalism performed its destructive mission—the dissolution of pre-capitalist relationships, the impoverishment of peasants and artisans—it did not absorb all of these classes into modern capitalist production.

This impoverishment hit the once prosperous Jewish communities particularly hard since the Tsarist Empire—a Bonapartist dictatorship of late feudalism desperately resisting the disintegrative tendencies of capitalism and bourgeois democracy—blocked the absorption of the Jews into Russian and Polish economic, social and political life. Whilst the Jews were no longer able to continue their old people-class role neither could they assimilate. They became a pariah caste within the Tsarist Empire.

The bourgeois revolutions in England, Holland, the United States and above all France liberated the Jews from their late medieval discriminatory laws or allowed them to officially "return" to countries from which they had been expelled. From the mid-18th to the mid-19th centuries a rapid process of modernisation and enlightenment developed within the Jewish communities leading to powerful assimilationist tendencies. However, by the last quarter of the 19th century a counter-active tendency developed; namely, anti-Semitism.

This had its social roots in the decaying classes, the half-ruined aristocracy, the peasants, the artisans and small shopkeepers. In Central Europe modern capitalist development was rapidly and ruthlessly ruining all these classes. Yet none could turn against the capitalist class as a whole. In addition the spread of universal suffrage drove sections of ruling class politicians like Bismark to create a reactionary electoral base.

The anti-Semitic pogroms of 1882-3 in Russia started a process of westward emigration towards Germany, France, England and the USA. A tiny group of Jews (Lovers of Zion) emigrated to Palestine where they bought land. In France and England wealthy and respected leaders of the Jewish community were terrified that mass immigration by "backward" (i.e. unassimilated) "eastern" Jews would provoke a backlash. They started to fund and encourage colonisation schemes in North Africa and in Palestine too.

Zionism came together as a political movement under the inspiration of Theodor Herzl. Herzl became convinced that the anti-Semites were right about one thing: the Jews were a "foreign body" in Europe. He conceived it their task to create a Jewish state as a

colony outside of Europe. Having considered Argentina and Uganda the Zionist movement founded in 1898 realised that only the "ancient home" would appeal to religious Eastern European Jews (the only ones wishing to emigrate anywhere) and Palestine was a tempting prize to Russian, German, British and French imperialists because of the mineral resources located there and its geo-political strategic location.

Zionism aimed to achieve its goal through approaches to a succession of imperialist powers in the years before the First World War. But with the defeat of the central powers in this war and the Russian Revolution Zionism switched its attention to British imperialism which was poised to gain from the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

The Zionists however remained a tiny minority within the world wide Jewish communities and in Eastern Europe which as a whole remained committed either to Bourgeois liberalism (the upper classes and some petit bourgeois) or to the labour movement. Zionism remained a minority current in the Eastern European Jewish communities until the rise of fascism and the triumph of Stalinism.

Through the welter of small parties and their coalitions two fundamental traditions exist within Zionism whose founding figures were, respectively, Ber Borochov and Vladimir Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky started his political activity in Tsarist Russia as a leader and polemicist of the Union for Equal Rights, the Jewish bourgeois organisation with a mixed liberal and Zionist membership. He was a bitter enemy of the Bund (a Jewish workers' organisation) and of the left Zionists who looked to the working class.

In the early 1920s he became disillusioned both with official bourgeois Zionism and hostile to the ascendancy that Labour Zionism was establishing in Palestine. In addition he lost all faith in the British Mandate Authorities who were limiting settlement to an annual quota. In 1924 he founded the Revisionist Party whose tactics and strategy were to force the British to allow unlimited entry, to form Jewish military and police units and to seize the Arabs' land. His objective was an autonomous Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. In 1935 Jabotinsky split from the World Zionist Organisation. His party, and especially its youth wing, flirted with Mussolini and Italian fascism. The Labour Zionists denounced it as fascist. By 1939 the Revisionists formed the terrorist Irgun Zvai Leumi as an alternative to the labour dominated Zionist army (*Haganah*).

Labour Zionism on the other hand has its roots in the period around the 1905 Revolution in Russia and its influence on the Jewish artisan, petit bourgeois and less class conscious worker. Bev Borochov started his career as a convinced Zionist although for a few months he was a member of the RSDLP (1900-01) before being expelled. He was also active in the local groups that called themselves "Poale Zion" (Work-

ers of Zion). Before 1905 Borochov was moving rightwards however, pouring scorn on the hopes that revolution in Russia would ease the plight of the Jews. At this stage he believed that the Palestinian *Fellaheen* would be absorbed into the Jewish nation.

However the 1905-07 revolution had a powerful impact on him and in 1906-07 he altered his positions substantially. He became organiser and coordinator of the Poale Zion groups and helped centralise them into a party, founded in February 1906 with the name Jewish Social Democratic Labour Party (Poale Zion). Whilst it demanded "personal autonomy" and a Jewish parliament (*seyni*) as steps towards territorial independence it placed most of its stress on participation in the Russian Revolution against Tsarism. Clearly it was influenced by the Bund and on tactical questions stood closer to Bolshevism than Menshevism.

On Palestine Borochov believed it would "naturally" develop as the centre for Jewish capital and labour given the unwillingness of the western states to let in Jews. The Poale Zion movement should create labour exchanges and organise workers in Palestine but "it would be a great error to suggest that we call for emigration to Palestine. That we leave to the natural process". Borochov's reasons for clinging to the Palestine project was that the Jews, because of economic development, did not have a large proletariat. To obtain this they would have to settle in their own territory. Thereby the over-large bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie would disappear and then a "normal" labour movement would move on to socialism. It was this latter idea that triumphed as Labour Zionism. During the 1920s Poale Zion developed branches in America, in Western Europe and in Palestine. In Russia Poale Zion took an anti-war stand in 1914 and rallied to the defence of the workers' state after 1917.

The Mandate and colonisation

The project of a mass colonisation of Palestine by Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe would never have got beyond the literal state of a utopia had it not been for the plans of the imperialist powers to dismember the Ottoman Empire, a process that had begun in the 1840s. As early as May 1916 French and British imperialism embodied this plan in the notorious Sykes-Picot Agreement.

They developed a scheme for dividing the Arabs by developing allies who would help them dominate the region. One of these was to be a project of colonial settlement of Palestine. Imperialism found the projects of big bourgeois like Rothschild, for exploitation of the Palestinians, directly to hand. The Balfour declaration of November 1917 proclaimed that the British supported the setting up of a "national home" for the Jews in Palestine.

The main reasons of the British were military/strategic; control of the Suez Canal, the railway lines to the Persian Gulf and stop-over points on the projected air links to India. In addition it would facilitate economic control of the Iraqi and Persian oilfields. From 1918 under the protection of the British military authorities Chaim Weizmann and the Zionist Commission began to organise the settler community in Palestine. A quota of 16-17,000 immigrants a year was agreed. Between 1918 and 1939 this led to a rise of the Jewish population from 60,000 to 445,000 or nearly 30% of the population. Land was purchased by the various Zionist agencies usually from big absentee landlords resident in Beirut or Egypt. Arab peasant tenants were unceremoniously bundled off the land their forebears had worked for centuries.

Yet even in 1939 this only resulted in 5% of the total land area of Palestine being in Jewish hands. Only by theft, mass expulsions and terror could the Palestinian peasantry be dispossessed. As well as settlers and land only a massive influx of capital could have established the settlers. Jewish bourgeois immigrants from Germany, prevented by racist immigration laws from entering Britain, France and the USA brought substantial quantities of capital between 1920-35.

To land, immigrants and capital had to be added the crucial element of Jewish Labour. Here the Labour or Socialist Zionists of Poale Zion played a crucial role. Rothschild and the big bourgeois Zionists were quite happy to super-exploit Arab labour in their settlements and factories but the "Marxist" Zionists realised that this would turn the Jewish settlers into a privileged petit bourgeois stratum, dependent on the exploitation of Arab labour and thus ultimately doomed to be overthrown by them. Hence they campaigned and organised for Jewish labour only.

This led to the formation of the Histadrut (General Federation of Jewish Workers in the Land of Israel) in 1920. Its General Secretary and founding leader of Israel, David Ben Gurion said "Without it, I doubt whether we would have had a state". In the inter-war years it was the Zionist state in embryo. It organised a systematic boycott and exclusion of Arab labour and increasingly of Arab farm products. Next to the government it was from the 1930s the largest single employer.

Up to 1936 this process had the benevolent support and protection of the British Mandatory Authorities who systematically refused to recognise the Arabs and Palestinians as a people or nation at all, recognising only religious communities. The Arabs were given no civil or political rights, whereas the Jewish Agency was consulted as a quasi-official body.

The Jewish settlers, coming from an imperialist state, albeit a backward one, were used to and expected European wage rates. Palestinian Arabs were paid at a historically lower subsistence rate. There-

fore in purely economic terms Jewish labour would never be able to compete for employment by a neutral capitalist. Hence the necessity for an isolated separate Jewish economy. The Jewish workers were thus from the outset a labour aristocracy within Palestine. Average personal income was in a ratio of 2:1 for unskilled workers and even with skilled workers the Jewish settler earned 70% more than his Arab equivalent.

Whereas the class profile of the *yesuv* (Jewish community under the mandate) showed a basically advanced capitalist structure the Arab population showed a profile of "backward" economic development. For the Arabs in 1943 59% worked in agriculture whereas for the Jews the figure was 19.1%. In construction, industry and mining the figures were 11.9% and 30.6% respectively.

None of the left Zionist or Labour Zionist parties opposed this vicious violation of class solidarity and internationalism. Indeed the Labour Zionists were the main proponents of this apartheid-like policy. The Histadrut was a Zionist-chauvinist labour front which tied the Jewish workers to the state and the employers, whilst impeding the class organisation of the Arab proletarians. It fought hard to split and destroy unions that united Arab and Jewish workers (e.g. the railway workers' union). Eventually in 1934 the Histadrut set up a pathetic and subordinate Arab section.

The Arabs in Palestine

Palestine was conquered by the Arabs in the seventh century AD from the Byzantine Empire. They neither found an empty country nor did they drive out the existing population and settle it *en masse*. They found living there a peasantry descended from the Canaanites, the Hebrews, the Philistines (from whom the country takes its name) and minorities of Greeks, Syrians etc. From these peoples as well as the Arab tribes the modern Palestinians are descended. Gradually Arabic replaced the earlier related Semitic language, Aramaic, which the population (including the Judaeans) had spoken.

Palestine passed in the early 16th century into the hands of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. It remained a part of the Empire but its large landowners exercised considerable autonomy. Palestine did not constitute a single province or unit nor did the Palestinians as a whole distinguish themselves from their surrounding fellow Arabic speakers. The country was in fact ruled by the head of a series of clans (*ashair*) each headed by a sheikh appointed by the most powerful households within the clan.

In 1858 a new land law greatly stimulated the break up of clan property and the emergence of great landowners and impoverished landless peasants. The landlords became landowners more easily, shedding

the traditional restrictions on the buying and selling of land. The sheiks of the clans lost their power in favour of the newly "enfranchised" landowners.

The losers in this "land reform" were the peasants who, even as late as 1922, formed 81% of the population. They lost their communal rights and having no written title to their lands were often evicted. Whereas seed and tools had been advanced to the individual peasant family by the clan organisation before now the peasants had to turn to urban moneylenders for loans. Debt bondage, foreclosure and evictions followed on a massive scale.

Into this already class divided countryside dominated by rich landlords who lived in the cities—Jerusalem, Jaffa, Nablus but also Beirut and even further afield—came the Zionist settlers. Well funded they found it relatively easy to buy land from the *effendis* (feudal landowners).

The other component of the ruling class were the urban merchants. Often they belonged to non-Muslim and sometimes non-Arab communities—Greeks, Italians, Armenians, Jews. They held a privileged position because of the "capitulations" the Ottoman government made to the western powers whereby extra-territorial rights were granted to various communities. Amongst these were freedom from paying customs dues.

The drawing of Palestine into the world economy dominated by European capitalism as well as the development of capitalist agrarian relations enormously increased trade and consequently the growth and importance of the ports of Gaza, Jaffa, and Haifa. Amongst the Arab population the Christians almost monopolised big and small scale trade and became a prosperous *petit bourgeoisie*.

The Palestinian bourgeoisie was weak because of the whole development of the country and moreover was largely made up of minority communities. It therefore fell to the landowners to lead or rather mislead the resistance of the Palestinians to the Zionist settlement. The key figure between the wars was the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini. Against him was ranged the Nashashibis who held the mayoralty of Jerusalem. Both oscillated between opposition to the British and the Zionists and concession and conciliation.

The Mufti and the landowners in general tried to divert hostility from the big landowners—who were themselves evicting peasants and selling land to the Zionist agencies—onto the settlers. This led to vicious attacks on the Jews by mobs of the urban and village poor and the Mufti evinced strong anti-Semitic tendencies. Their resistance to the British—who paid their salaries and could dismiss them from office—was far more circumspect.

Only in 1936 did a truly national and popular uprising against the British develop. The world economic crisis and stagnation meant a rise in unemployment amongst Arab and Jewish workers after

1936. Since Hitler came to power three years before the flood of immigration had increased and with it the increases in land purchase and evictions. Conflicts between Jewish settlers and evicted Arab villagers increased. In October 1936 Arab dock workers struck and were replaced with Jewish scabs.

Guerrilla warfare broke out in Gallilee. Rioting in Egypt against the British and a general strike in Syria inspired the Arabs in Palestine. Local committees were formed from below and a general strike proclaimed which lasted for six months. Gradually the strike movement developed into an all out rebellion aimed at the British and to a lesser extent the Zionist settlements. In 1936 at least 5,000 guerrillas were fighting in the hills. As a result of British repression the Palestinian elite fled to surrounding states and the movement in 1937 became a spontaneous, largely peasant movement.

The landowner-bourgeois leaders betrayed the peasant struggle—calling an armistice in 1936 and entering into secret negotiations with the Zionists and the British, coquetting with Nazi German imperialism. They were terrified of the peasant uprising and indeed most landowners fled the countryside. The rebellion was in the end crushed but it did alert the British to the need to shift the axis of their Middle East policy towards Arab nationalists and away from sole dependence on the Zionists.

From fascism to founding Israel

Before 1945 Zionism never became a majority ideology amongst the Jewish communities of Europe or North America. However, the holocaust with its murder of six million Jews allowed Zionism to triumph and the state of Israel to be founded.

Anti-Semitism was central to Nazi ideology. The Jews constituted the historic foe of the Aryan "master race". The attacks on Jewish world finance involved an attack on Germany's rivals—British, American and French imperialism—which were said to be at the service of Jewish bankers. However, Nazi anti-Semitism was not simply the most violent form of an all-pervasive anti-Semitism that contaminated the whole world as the Zionists claim.

This fails to recognise the specific class roots of German fascism which was a product of a tremendously acute social crisis in a defeated imperialist country "robbed" of its few colonies by rival imperialism. The failure of the KPD or SPD to take power in the revolutionary crisis of 1923 allowed fascism to grow amongst the *petit bourgeoisie* and *lumpenproletariat*.

Before 1933 anti-Semitism was not the most central part of fascism's appeal to these layers. In the big cities even after 1933 anti-Semitism was met with indifference and sometimes with hostility. Apart from the Stormtroopers there was little "popular" partici-

pation in the pogroms. In Austria and southern Germany, however, there was a greater degree of spontaneously occurring violent acts carried out against the Jews by the peasantry and urban petit bourgeoisie; the former often found themselves in debt to Jewish merchant capital and the latter faced competition from a broader layer of Jewish urban petit bourgeoisie than elsewhere.

After 1933 anti-Semitism was a state policy. The first wave of anti-Jewish measures was a strictly limited concession to the petit bourgeois mass base of fascism. But it went alongside the destruction of this mass base's political influence (e.g. the "Night of the Long Knives", June 1934) by Hitler at the behest of the big German monopolists who allowed Hitler to come to power but wanted their interests safeguarded from the dangers of the "rabble".

The removal of German citizenship from most Jews in September 1934, the restrictions on the flight of Jewish capital and the setting up of emigration offices gave way to less intense discrimination between 1935 and 1937 as economic recovery took off and the Stormtroopers demobilised. The threat of renewed recession and the imminence of war in 1938 led to a more vigorous campaign. From November 1938 Jewish property was confiscated wholesale, and Jews were excluded from education and entertainment and forced to wear the Star of David in public. At this time those wealthier Jews who could fled, leaving the rest together with socialists, gays and gypsies to face imprisonment, ghettoisation and then extermination in the camps.

By 1939 the failure of German autarchy posed the need to break out to the east and south to plunder the industrial and agricultural riches of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and the Ukraine. But in these war zones there was a major concentration of world Jewry.

That the Germans were able to wipe out nearly all these people was a uniquely horrible act of planned genocide—unique, that is, in the high proportion of a people wiped out in an extremely brief period. However, it was far from unique if by this is meant that Nazi genocide applied only to the Jews. German imperialism, of which Nazism was the "chemically pure distillation" wished to occupy and colonise the rich agricultural lands of Poland and the Ukraine. Most of the populations of these areas were unwanted.

Thus the Germans slaughtered and starved to death millions of Slavs—more than the sum total of Jews. At first the Jews, too, were meant to be worked to death. But after the *Blitzkrieg* failed to achieve a lightning victory over the Soviet Union the liquidation of enemies in the rear was stepped up. The SS was charged from early 1942 with the "final solution". Between 1939 and 1941 Jews had already been herded into ghettos and specially constructed concentration camps. From 1942 death camps were constructed or

converted, designed to liquidate eleven million Jews, first through forced labour and then by wholesale extermination. By 1943 knowledge of all this was filtering abroad. By 1945 between five and six million had been massacred—the most concentrated act of genocide so far attempted in human history.

Zionist accounts of the holocaust present this genocide as an isolated fact in human history, linking it only to anti-Semitism. Yet this is clearly not the case. Millions of native Americans from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, untold numbers of Africans in two centuries of slave trade have been victims of genocide too. Modern imperialist racism arose to justify these horrors. Marxists have no wish to detract from the special horror of the holocaust—special in the concentrated and intense nature of the genocide—in any way but we do insist that it was not unique and nor was its fundamental origin in anti-Semitism. Rather, it was a product of imperialism's extreme crisis.

Much dispute has raged over the evidence of collusion between the Zionists and the Nazis. Zionists deny or minimise it. For overzealous "anti-Zionists" and some conservative Arab nationalists it is evidence of an absolute identity between evil genocidal Nazism and Zionism. The historical evidence confirms neither view. Zionism before 1933 played no significant role in Jewish resistance to the rise of Nazism. It looked on Nazi-ism with a sanguine eye. The Zionists too wanted a Germany free of Jews provided that these Jews could emigrate to Palestine and nowhere else. As a result while socialists, communists and even liberal Jews were courageous fighters against Hitler, the Zionists attempted to do a deal with him.

Thus the Zionists Federation of Germany was in direct negotiations with the SS for several years. The SS allowed Zionist periodicals and even a uniformed Zionist youth movement to exist when all other political organisations were persecuted. Even during the war itself Rudolf Kastner, Secretary of the Zionist Committee in Budapest, negotiated with Adolf Eichmann for 1,000 wealthy Jews to escape to Switzerland in return for the Zionists good offices in persuading Hungary's 800,000 Jews to be deported "peacefully".

As a result over 200,000 were deported to Auschwitz and other death camps. Yet this degree of collusion was special and at heart contradicted the project of Zionism which aimed to get as many Jews as possible to Palestine. In order to realise this, during the war the Zionists inside the USA and Europe were opposed to any relaxation of racist immigration controls operated by the imperialist democracies.

Zionism in an attempt to negate anti-Semitism ends up confirming the law of the unity of opposites. This is not to equate or identify the two but to insist that firstly Zionism is a product and a response to anti-

Semitism and that secondly, it is a response which cannot overcome it because it accepts anti-Semitism's definition of the widespread Jewish religious communities and their tendency to see their assimilation under capitalism as a problem.

Zionism sees Jewishness as unambiguously good whereas anti-Semitism sees it as an evil. But Zionism needs anti-Semitism, it is its *raison d'être*. It believes it is the force that will continue to drive the Jewish communities towards Palestine. Thus Zionists have negotiated with anti-Semites to facilitate this process.

Does this mean that the Zionists colluded with the "final solution"? No, but it does mean that that they did nothing to aid the plight of its victims (although Zionists could and did join in heroic uprisings such as in the Warsaw Ghetto) whilst it was being prepared and even after it was underway they did little beyond smuggling a relative handful of refugees into Palestine.

The creation of Israel

Zionism, as a colonial settler movement had to be strategically allied to one imperialist power or another. Not only did these powers provide the funds for settlement but more importantly they controlled the Middle East. British imperialism was hegemonic there from 1918 until 1947-53 when it was supplanted by the USA.

The conflict between Zionism and Britain was not an anti-imperialist struggle by the former. Rather, it was a conflict provoked by a switch of policy by Britain in 1939. By then British imperialism accepted that in order to maintain control over strategic resources, such as the Suez canal, rail and air routes, and the oil fields of Iraq and the Gulf, it would have to oversee the creation of pliant Arab semi-colonial regimes. This involved propping up the monarchies of Egypt, Iran, Transjordan, Iraq and the Gulf states. But this in turn meant scaling down Britain's commitment to the Zionists.

This change was evident from 1936, when the Palestinian uprising indicated the threat of Arab nationalism. But it was retarded by the outbreak of World War Two and the support for Britain given by the Zionists. But during the war the Zionist right prepared for the eventual conflict with Britain. While the Irgun guerrilla group suspended operations against the British in the war the "Stern Gang" (LEHY) did not and even tried to make contacts with the fascists.

While the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem helped the SS in the war, Irgun and Haganah fought with the British. This helped transform Haganah into a professional armed force. Meanwhile the British disarmed and crushed the organisations of the Arabs in Palestine.

With the end of the war the conflict between Britain and Zionism resumed. The Zionists lobbied hard with US imperialism to get immediate permission for 100,000 survivors of the holocaust to be allowed into Palestine. But the dominant Arabist faction within the British ruling class aimed to block this and negotiate a partition of Palestine between the Zionists and Transjordan, which would allow a strategic military presence for Britain.

But Britain both underestimated the strength of the new US-Zionist alliance and the resistance of the Palestinians to this plan. Three years of struggle to stop "illegal" immigration, to suppress both Arab and Zionist "terrorism" failed completely. In February 1947 Britain announced it would end its mandate by August 1948. In fact, they withdrew unilaterally in May 1948 in order to try and realise their plans by proxy, by co-ordinating an invasion of the so-called "Arab armies". In truth the only force capable of fighting the Haganah was the Arab Legion, led, trained and armed by Britain.

No serious threat was posed by the Arab forces (e.g. Egypt, Syria and Lebanon), partly because they were undertrained and unarmed as a result of previous British policy; partly because the Transjordan monarchy was only interested in a deal with the Zionists for partition around the UN proposed borders which would allow Britain a role. But the USA was opposed to any British presence and so rushed to aid the newly founded state of Israel. Stalinism too rushed to aid Israel. The Kremlin supported the creation of the state of Israel because it believed that it may have been able to exert political influence over the Zionists and so fill the vacuum created by the departure of British imperialism. In the face of this balance of forces the Palestinians suffered a historic catastrophe.

They were brutally driven out of their towns and villages throughout the area that the Zionists decided was militarily conquerable and holdable. Jaffa was attacked by Haganah and Irgun and its Arab population of 100,000 was reduced in days to 5,000. Atrocities such as Dir Yassin (250 murdered) were calculated acts of barbarity designed to spread panic and induce the Palestinians to flee.

Why did the Zionists not settle for the UN plan which the USA and Britain were happy to see? In essence because even the undemocratic UN planned partition (which awarded 54% of the area to 33% of its population that was Jewish) still left the Arabs as a bare majority in the proposed Jewish state, where they would own three-quarters of the land.

The pogroms and 1948-49 war was conducted to carry out a radical extension of the area under the control of Israel and a much reduced presence of Arabs within it. In the war the Arab states cynically grabbed what they could (e.g. Egypt, the Gaza Strip, Transjordan, East Jerusalem) but the Palestinians were left with nothing. Israel finished with 73% of the area

(including the mineral rich Negev desert) and in the process 750,000 Palestinians were driven off their land and from their homes in the wretched refugee camps into the surrounding pro-British semi-colonial Arab states.

In the conflict between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists it was necessary to have been defeatist in relation to the Zionists and militarily supported the resistance of the Arabs. The "War of Independence" was in fact a war to establish a pro-imperialist colonial-settler state in the Middle East, under the dominance of the USA. It was a war which denied the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination.

It was correct to be defeatist in relation to the struggle waged by Transjordan and later Egypt in the War of Independence. The defeat of Israel was a lesser evil as it would have seriously disrupted the attempt of Israel to establish a stable pro-imperialist regime in the region, and one based on the expulsion of the mass of Palestinians from their land. However, we would not have supported the war aims of the Arab League which were annexationist. We would have fought the Arab League's attempt to enforce its own version of partition, exposed the attempted deals struck with Israel against the interests of the Palestinians and been intransigent foes of the Arab league's anti-Semitism.

Class and nation in Israel

Despite the political role that Israel plays in the Middle East Israel itself cannot be considered an imperialist country in economic terms. Although it possesses many unique features, it should be understood as a special type of advanced, privileged, "subsidised semi-colony". The most decisive structural feature of Israel's economic subordination to imperialism has been its overwhelming dependence on capital imports for investment. Between 1952 and 1985 Israel has received some \$40 billion of long term capital imports in the form of grants, reparation payments from West Germany and donations from the Jewish diaspora, none of which have needed repaying. In addition, low interest long term loans from the USA have furnished the means for capital investment in Israel. Since Israel's exports of goods and services have never been more than 65% of the level of imports (including capital) as a consequence Israel has run a permanent balance of payments deficit.

Over time the weight of reparations payments and donations from world Zionism has fallen and loans and grants from the USA have risen. Since 1973 the USA has contributed between 45% and 51% of all capital imports on an annual basis and between 60% and 80% of all long term loans.

In the period between 1950 and 1973 Israel's econ-

omy grew at a fast pace, suffering only one recession in 1965-66. The massive influx of immigrants together with the import of capital allowed expanded accumulation to take place in the context of a long boom for world imperialism. This period witnessed the displacement of citrus fruit production and diamond polishing industries by the growth of import-substitution manufacturing industry, especially in textiles, food processing and later in chemicals and mining. Despite this growth the main structural change in imports has been in consumer durables. In the forty years of existence Israel has reduced its share of these in overall imports from 31% to 8%. But dependency on oil for energy has tripled and raw materials imports have grown while the proportion of capital investment goods imports has only dropped from 22% in 1949 to 18.7% in 1984.

Throughout the transformation process there was negligible foreign ownership of fixed capital. This remains the case today with the virtual absence of exploitation in Israel by imperialism. Moreover, the export of capital from the USA and Europe was undertaken not in order to realise a "surplus profit" but to sustain the state of Israel for political reasons.

The import of capital in such huge amounts allowed the rapid accumulation to take place without the super-exploitation of an internal section of the working class or through massive taxation as in many of the less developed countries (LDC's). On the contrary, the accumulation took place alongside an expansion of living standards for the majority of the population.

By the end of the 1960s Israel possessed a highly monopolised and modern industrial economy, including a banking sector. Its internal market was saturated, its export orientated industries growing. But, unlike South Africa these were not to prove sufficient preconditions for Israel to make the transition to a minor imperialist power. There are several reasons for this;

(a) The end of the long boom during 1971-73, the massive shock to Israel of the 1973-75 recession, the curtailment in export markets.

(b) The inwardly directed nature of investment by Israel state and private monopoly capital due to the very nature of the Zionist state. Finance capital had up until 1973 small amounts of foreign capital abroad (petro-chemicals, loans) but insignificant in scope; since 1973 Israeli banks have persistently had net foreign liabilities. Between 1980-84 net total portfolio investments of Israeli finance capital abroad was a mere \$1.2 billion; net direct fixed investments was negative for the same period.

Above all, the need to consolidate the whole Jewish population behind the state undermined the process of class differentiation and compelled investment to be internal to sustain jobs, welfare, housing, wages, rather than look for super-profits abroad by recycling externally the capital imports from the USA

and elsewhere. On the other hand it has been impossible politically to mimic South Africa and rely upon a massive super-exploited working class within the nation. The contradiction of a "Jewish closed economy" prevented the evolution of Israeli finance capital into an imperialist capital. Israel's development was frozen. There is no internal self-sustaining dynamic of capital accumulation and this leads to limited class polarisation.

(c) Finally, Israel cannot be considered an imperialist country even by virtue of its relationship with the occupied territories since 1967. The West Bank and Gaza do provide a constant source of surplus cheap labour for Israel and a captive market for the high productivity citrus fruit agribusiness of Israel. But this has to be set against the fact that as a result of the war of 1967 Israel was cut off from its large natural hinterland in the rest of the Middle East. It has to be set against the fact there is no industrial or infrastructural development in the Occupied Territories under the spur of Israeli finance capital. The parallel here is more the economic relationship that exists between the Philippines and the more developed LDCs in South East Asia or even Peru's dependency on Brazil. Finally, it has to be set against the huge costs to Israel of military occupation.

Israel then is not even a minor imperialist power, despite its pro-imperialist proxy role in the region (and in Latin America and South Asia etc). Israel is a special type of semi-colony, one whose condition is masked by its relationship to imperialism rather than fundamentally altered. We can characterise its advanced or privileged semi-colonial status thus:

(a) Its semi-colonial dependency is not based on the repatriation of super-profits from fixed investments. Between 1952 and 1984 there was a mere total of \$2 billion of foreign investment in Israel.

(b) The debt burden, while it is a channel for exploitation through interest repayments, is more a burden on its future than its present. On the one hand, as the size of the capital imports has grown in the 1970s and 1980s, as weight of loans over grants has increased and as the Israeli economic growth has faltered badly in the post-1973 period, then the foreign indebtedness of Israel has grown apace. In the 1980s this has been exacerbated by an increasing tendency for Israel to rely on short term loans. By 1986 Israel's foreign debt was \$24 billion and growing. In 1985-86 debt repayments were \$8 billion out of a government spending total of \$21 billion.

On the other hand, interest payments are a much smaller proportion of export earnings (17%-20%) than in Brazil or Mexico and they are far outweighed by the inflow of new capital on favourable terms as well as grants. Since 1982 while there has been a heavy net drain of capital from Latin America, Israel continues to enjoy a net surplus (i.e. new loans exceed net repayments).

(c) The subordinate nature of Israel's economy

flows from its dependency on continued privileged treatment over its debt and from the privileged access that Israeli exports have to many European and US markets as well as access to markets that the major imperialists would prefer not to have, or have only through Israel. Like certain other semi-colonies in Africa, Israel is not an economically profitable semi-colony considered in isolation. But its presence and role in the Middle East helps to ensure the continued super-exploitation of other Arab semi-colonies in the region.

The political independence that Israel shows vis a vis the USA flows not from any independent economic power but through its ability to lean upon the economically powerful Jewish community in the USA itself whose Zionist big bourgeoisie is an important sector of the US ruling class.

Whereas Israel's growth rates were favourable in comparison with the OECD nations in the 1960s in the 1970s and 1980s they have been lower than OECD and LDC (especially Newly Industrialised Countries) averages. In terms of material consumption levels, provision of social welfare, literacy etc Israel is comparable to Spain, a level sustained only by massive external aid rather than any internal self-sustaining cycle of accumulation. In general falling immigration and rising emigration bear witness to the unfavourable development of Israel since 1973.

Since 1973 Israel's economy has lurched from crisis to crisis; massive inflation, spiralling indebtedness, low growth. Unlike Brazil and others, Israel was not able to undertake accelerated industrial growth after the 1973-75 recession via recycled OPEC petro-dollars, partly due to political reasons and partly because of its already heavy debt burden. The internal structure of the manufacturing sector did change in the 1970s and 1980s with electronics and weapons coming more to prominence in the export sector. This has been mainly as a result of US and South African investment whose purpose is to sustain outlets for these goods to areas of the world which South Africa and the USA find it difficult politically to relate to directly.

The 1980s have brought the highest inflation in the world (1981), a disastrous and costly military adventure in Lebanon (1982), and a stock market collapse (1983) with growth hovering at an average below 2% per annum for the decade.

It has taken an unprecedented national coalition since 1984 to be able to stabilise the economic situation to a degree, introduce monetary reform, get inflation down to low double figures and introduce austerity.

Hence we conclude that Israel is a capitalist state, a relatively well developed one. But it is not an imperialist country; rather it is a type of semi-colony, one which is subordinate to US (and to a lesser extent European) imperialism. The majority of its workers in no way suffer exploitation or super-exploita-

tion by imperialist capital. On the contrary, its non-Arab workers benefit from the import of imperialist capital.

The unique character of this state is to be understood in the colonial project of Zionism and imperialism to have a local gendarme in the Middle East. This coincidence of interests alone accounts for the materialisation and continuation of the reactionary-utopia that is Israel. Were imperialist finance capital to remove its support the Zionist state would collapse into economic chaos, class conflict and heightened struggle by the Palestinians for national liberation.

The structural features of ownership and control of Israeli capital in the post-1948 state were laid down in the *Yishuv*. The colonising project of Labour Zionism under the British Mandate was controlled by the Histadrut, founded in 1920 by the left Zionist parties. It sponsored and organised the growth of the Zionist agricultural settlements in Palestine—the *kibbutzim* and later the *moshavim* (rural settlements, mainly oriental Jews using larger landed tracts based on individual ownership but marketing goods on a co-operative basis). Indeed, in the immediate post-foundation years the bulk of Israel's GDP and exports were products of the *kibbutzim*. Apologists for Zionism have long pointed to these settlements as evidence of Israel's social democratic nature or as islands of "socialism" within Israel.

In origin they were the advanced guards of colonisation. After 1948 they were the border garrison posts of the new state. In reality their famous co-operativism and egalitarian self-denial was a product of economic necessity. Jewish labour came from an area with a higher historic cost of reproduction than Arab labour which would in Palestine mean that Arab labour would always undercut Jewish labour in a free market.

Jewish labour thus had to exclude Arab labour from competing and at the same time "exploit itself" voluntarily to promote rapid accumulation. They have always been organised in order to create a surplus for profitable sale in the export market. The post-1948 formation of the *moshavim* was a further sacrifice of the "co-operative" ideal to the laws of the market.

Today, the *kibbutzim* are more marginal to the economic life of Israel, more capitalistically run (capital intensive), are regarded by many Jews as a "planter aristocracy" and are almost totally supporters of Labour Zionism. They only embrace 3% of the Jewish population (almost exclusively Ashkenazi) and involve the super-exploitation of the oriental Jews in the menial tasks who do not live on the *kibbutz*.

As a result of its origins in the "pioneer settlements" of the Mandate period the Histadrut in the early 1980s was responsible for nearly 80% of the total employment in agriculture. It played a decisive military, economic and political role in the colonisation project of Zionism by driving Palestinians from

their land. They did nothing to promote class based unity and solidarity among all workers of the region. Rather they deliberately sought to bar the Palestinian workers from the unions and denied them their democratic rights in general. In sum the Histadrut was never in its predominant character a trade union and has become less and less so in the forty years of the existence of the Israeli state. We must fight to break up the Histadrut and build new unions.

Since 1948 the Histadrut has diversified its capital ownership into construction, banking, some transport and manufacturing. Its industrial conglomerate, Koor, employs 20% of the Histadrut membership; its construction monopoly, Soheh Boneh, employed 26% of the membership in 1976. It owns Bank Hapoalim, one of the three big banking monopolies. In all the Histadrut owned businesses account for some 23% of GDP (1980).

Consequently, it is naive to portray the Histadrut as a trade union even though today some 60% of all Israelis are members of this "trade union" which embraces workers, housewives and employers of five or less workers all of whom are eligible to join. In origin it was the main institution of colonial settlement, run by Labour Zionism. As its economic interests evolved beyond the petit bourgeois confines of the early *kibbutzim* into industry it developed a Labour Department to represent the interests of the employees that it in part employed! The top personnel of the Histadrut's companies, unions and the Labour Party are interlocking or even identical. In addition it also organises the health insurance for the whole of Israel's population, which accounts for over 60% of the membership's dues. Nevertheless, it is where the Jewish (and Israeli Arab) workers are organised as workers on the economic front and it is necessary to work within it to accelerate the development of class consciousness, both trade union and political.

In its totality the Histadrut is one of the three pillars of Zionist capitalism serving to retard and repress class differentiation and polarisation. Alongside the Histadrut the state sector (a coalition of government, Jewish Agency, National Fund and United Jewish Appeal to the USA) controls up to 25% of the economy (30% of employment in 1982) and is the main conduit for capital imports. The state and Histadrut embrace the large modern plants in weaponry, chemicals and are heavily export oriented and, with the exception of construction, are mainly employers of Jewish labour. Private sector business interests are overwhelmingly concentrated in small and medium sized manufacturing units with an emphasis on consumer produced goods for the home market. Some two-thirds of the workforce in this sector are Arabs from inside and beyond the Green Line. As a result the weight of the private monopoly sector has grown in Israeli economic life as manufacturing has accounted for an increasing proportion of

domestic production and exports.

Over the course of the last forty years the Israeli Jews have become a nation. They have revived an archaic language (Hebrew) to become a first language amongst a majority of Israelis; a national culture transcends the ethnic divisions.

The main bearers of this national culture and consciousness are the Sabra (i.e. Israeli-born Jews) of all ethnic groups. But an important element of the national consciousness of the Israeli Jews is its chauvinist and oppressive attitude to the Arabs. The Israeli Jews, while they have forged a national consciousness in the last forty years which is distinct from their sense of themselves as part of world Jewry, are part of an oppressor nation; their national consciousness has been forged only by a simultaneous denial of the legitimate rights of the Palestinians to self-determination. Consequently Israel is an oppressor nation and as such we do not recognise its right to exist as a nation state.

Yet in considering the question of Israeli national identity account has to be taken of the enormously powerful disintegrative aspects of the ethnic and class contradictions both between the Israeli Arabs and the Jews and within the Jewish community itself.

To begin with, the state of Israel is in reality a creation of the Ashkenazi Jews, the half million or so who colonised it under the mandate and carved it out (arms in hand) in the period 1948-49. To a large extent it remains their state whichever party holds the governmental power. At every level they have the best jobs, hold the key levers of economic power, enjoy the best pay; their "culture" is taken as dominant and they are the main channel to the economic reservoir of world Jewry which is Ashkenazi above all.

But the Ashkanzim found themselves in possession of a state with too few people and with a class structure that was top heavy. The Zionists always recognised the need to draw in oriental Jews under the Mandate to provide a labour force for the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. This became a burning necessity in 1949. Even then the Ashkenazi were 85% urban, concentrated in administration and the service sector together with a small rural elite in the *kibbutzim*. Today the Ashkenazi Jewish workers are a veritable labour aristocracy within the state or Histadrut owned industrial sector and in the middle and upper echelons of the state bureaucracy.

From 1949 until 1951 in an unrestricted way and thereafter with some restrictions, the Labour Party government sucked in hundreds of thousands of Jews. In three years (after May 1948) the population of Israel jumped from 0.6 to 1.6 million. Only half the new arrivals could be considered survivors of the Holocaust, the rest were oriental Jews, drawn to Israel not because of any suffering as Jews in their previous countries but because of the promise of a better life. Despite the desire to do so Zionism has

been unable to attract significant numbers of Jews to Israel from Europe or the USA where life is for most at least as comfortable. They have not been much more successful with Soviet Jews, some 70% preferring not to go to or to stay in Israel after leaving the USSR.

The orientals were used first to colonise the vast acres of land from which the Palestinians had been expelled; located in "development towns" strategically placed behind the border *kibbutzim*. Secondly, they were to provide the vast reservoir of urban semi- and unskilled proletarians for Israeli capitalism. This need accelerated in the concentrated period of industrial growth after 1958.

The oriental Jews are discriminated against within Israeli society and are subject to an element of racial oppression from the European Jews. Through the mechanism of educational qualifications, amongst others, they are concentrated in manual, lower paid jobs within the state/Histadrut industrial sector, and to a lesser extent the lower rungs of clerical occupations. Today, the oriental Jews are the bulk of the industrial proletariat. Until recently they have rarely risen through the political administration to positions of prominence or power which have largely remained Ashkenazi/Labour Party controlled.

But since the 1967 war and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip the oriental Jews have experienced a degree of social/class mobility which has both further stratified them and consolidated the whole Jewish population of Israel into a shared common oppressive and exploitative relationship to the Palestinian Arabs.

The large absorption of Arab labour into the Israeli economy since 1967 has done several things. First, it has allowed large numbers of Jews to move out of the proletariat and become small employers of cheap Arab labour. Secondly, because cheap Arab labour undermined the wages of the oriental workers minimum wages have benefited these workers in the mixed sector.

In the closed (Jewish only) sector labour has been scarce, acting as a forcing house for capital intensive industry and creating demand for skilled labour, which has again benefited the Ashkenazi Jews. Everyone wins, so long as someone else (imperialism) foots the bill.

From these developments it is possible to discern a broad common attitude amongst all Jews in Israel to the continued occupation of the West Bank; no party wishes to end the cheap supply of labour across the Green Line. Without it the most of the small Jewish capitalists will lose out as will the workers. At the same time the extreme right is marginalised because its plans for a "Greater Israel" free of Arabs would have the same effect.

In addition to the ethnic/class differentiation within the Israeli Jews there exists considerable ethnic differentiation within the camp of the oriental Jews.

There are at least four religious groups: Sephardi (Spain), Bavli (Iraq), Roman (Italian) and Yemani. Moreover, the first have their own language (Ladino, a Castillian dialect with Hebrew alphabet) while the rest speak dialects of Arabic. Outside of these groups there are also the Moroccans (the majority of orientals), the Kurds, the Persians etc. Moreover, Yiddish is spoken by a minority.

There is hostility between these groups as well as a deep rooted ethnic and cultural diversity. It is well known that there is an economic stratification within the oriental Jews from Kurds at the bottom to the Sephardi at the top. All these distinctions are deliberately fostered by the Ashkanazi.

In addition during the last two decades Israeli Arabs have become less Israeli and more Palestinian in their consciousness as a consequence of the West Bank occupation. The Israeli Arabs form 18% of the population and nearly 80% of them are Muslim with the rest being Christian or Druze. They are citizens in a Jewish state, people or descendants of people who were trapped inside Israel after the "War of Independence" in 1949. Many of these have had their land taken away from them subsequently. Today they are among Israel's most super-exploited and oppressed citizens. They are denied access to many jobs, and are concentrated in the construction sector (over 40% of all Arabs are employed here). Many also work in the small-scale establishments of the private service sector that grew up in the post-1967 period. Their wage levels are up to 30% lower than those of the Ashkanazi and 10%-20% lower than for oriental Jews. In the 1970s their relative wages fell, under the impact of the flood of new labour across the Green Line as they found themselves in competition with their Palestinian brothers and sisters.

The oppression of the Israeli Arabs is justified by the most vicious anti-Arab racism which again confirms that Zionism, far from transcending anti-Semitism is parasitically dependent upon it. This unity of opposites reaches its most extreme form whenever both Labour and the Revisionists portray the Arabs as "stupid", "dirty", "lazy", "violent"—all of which is the stock in trade of western imperialist racism. Such racism can be used to justify atrocities from Dir Yassin to Sabra and Chatilla.

Zionism is a national chauvinist ideology that justifies itself through the use of racism. Is Zionism therefore simply racism? No, this does not follow at all. No ideologies are without contradictions, even those which are predominantly reactionary. There are Zionists who do seek to extend rights, even land to the Palestinian Arabs. But this progressive, anti-racist, democratic element within Zionism forms a distinct minority.

Nor is this to deny that there are reactionary elements in the relatively progressive democratic and anti-imperialist movements. They can even change their whole character when the progressive struggle

against national oppression is concluded. Arab nationalism can and does contain anti-communist, anti-working class and even anti-Semitic elements. But because the Palestinian struggle is a progressive one these components have a limited and subordinate impact. They draw their roots from economic backwardness in the Arab world (even feudal and semi-feudal forces), from the impact of imperialist exploitation on the urban poor and from an unthinking reaction to Zionist racism.

All this imposes a twin duty on revolutionary communists. On the one side, to fight alongside Palestinian nationalists while at the same time combating religious obscurantism and any anti-Jewish outbreaks. On the other, while fighting against Zionism and for the destruction of a state that fosters national and racist oppression of the Palestinians it is essential to strike tactical alliances with left Zionists (such as the Progressive List for Peace, Stalinists, Peace Now) in defence of democratic rights for the Palestinians, the better to break them from Zionism completely.

Broadly, there have been three major parties or blocs since 1948. The least significant has been the New Religious Party which existed in fragmented form before 1956. The small support for it (about 10% at its peak and declining thereafter) is a reflection of the overall weakness of religious parties in Israel. This, at first suprising, fact in a state that is obliged to embody religion in the self-definition of its citizenship is due to the orthodox religious parties being firmly opposed to the Zionist project in establishing the state of Israel. While they were the first to organise politically within the diaspora they were adamant that the diaspora was a punishment on the Jews that could not be righted by the work of man. Hence the generally secular nature of the main Zionist parties. Only the Holocaust forced them to reconsider and adopt a pragmatic attitude to Israel. The NRP formally advocates a policy of establishing Israel in the whole of Greater Israel, but its pragmatism has led several smaller rightist, orthodox parties to split or form independently since 1973 and especially since the treaty with Egypt was signed at Camp David in 1979.

For the first thirty years of its existence Israel was governed by Mapai (Israeli Labour Party—ILP—after 1967). This was founded in 1930 and was (and remains) the main party of the Ashkanazi Jews and hence the state bureaucracy, Histadrut and the *kibbutzim*. It has commanded the vote of a third or more of the population since 1949, up until 1961 standing alone and afterwards in various blocs. Today it is mainly a party of the privileged Ashkanazi labour aristocracy; the allegiance of the bulk of the (majority) oriental industrial proletariat do not see it as their party and in the main do not vote for it. This is also the case for the Arab workers.

It cannot be considered a bourgeois workers' party

of the Israeli working class because as a party tied to the Histadrut (and its corporate capital) and the main national institutions of the state the ILP does not rest on the organisations of the working class. Revolutionaries cannot call for a vote for it.

The smaller Mapam Party was the party of the *kibbutzim* "pioneers" whose ideology was a mix of petit bourgeois socialism and Zionism. It used to be able to command some 14% of the vote. But as the *kibbutzim* have declined in importance and changed their nature, their allegiance has shifted towards the ILP and Mapam has been forced to shelter under its wing.

The third political bloc is that of the open parties of the nationalist bourgeoisie. One side has its roots in the Revisionists who split into differing factions in the 1920s and 1930s over their attitude to the mandate and the future state's boundaries. But by 1951 they had found their home in the Herut Party. The Liberal Party was a more respectable party (i.e. free of the stigma of terrorism) at the service of the growing private bourgeoisie of the new state. The formation of Likud in 1973 as a coalition of both Herut and the Liberals was a result of the growing weight of the private sector bourgeoisie and the rise of the hawks after "winning" the 1967 and 1973 wars. This coalition made a successful challenge to the hegemony of Labour possible. The growth of the oriental Jewish population, with its alienation from Labour and the Ashkanazim, made possible the successful demagogic manipulation of their hopes for a better deal. Election success followed in 1977 and 1981, which returned the two Likud governments of Begin/Shamir.

In essence very little divides the Labour and Likud

blocs in the field of domestic economic policy. Rhetoric, demagoguery and naked buying of votes are routinely directed at their respective "constituencies" in election time. This flows from the need of all Zionist parties to keep together the Jewish bloc and retard class differentiation. It is evidenced by the record of the National Coalition 1984-88.

The main differences are to be found in perspectives for dealing with the Arab states and the Palestinian's fight for self-determination. On the one hand both Labour and Likud are united in their resistance to the desire of the extreme right (Kach, Shass, Tehiya—products of the disgust at Camp David)—for more restrictive measures against the Arabs and against those like Peace Now who would give the Palestinians their own state. This is because both proposals would undermine the Arabs essential function in the Zionist economy.

On the other hand they are divided over whether this function should be preserved by continuing the occupation of the West Bank (with all the consequent political instability, and especially the deepening polarising effect it has within Zionism since the failure of the Lebanon war of 1982), which is Likud's strategy. Likud also favours increased settlements in the West Bank because in recent years this has consolidated its base amongst the orientals who are now the bulk of the new "settlers".

Labour, on the other hand, would prefer to seek a negotiated settlement with US imperialism and the conservative Arab regimes (especially Egypt and Jordan) who could then police a Bantustan "Palestinian" state on the West Bank while preserving its function as supplier of cheap labour and captive market for Israeli agriculture.

The mirage of the Arab Nation

At the heart of pan-Arab nationalism is the belief that behind the fragmentation of the Middle East into many diverse nation states lies one Arab nation, united by a common language and culture, capable of economic unity or integration. It is a mirage.

Today over 100 million people speak the same language (Arabic) across 15 countries stretching from Morocco to the Gulf, from the Mediterranean to the Upper Nile.

Yet the Arab world is evidently divided too. Asked "what is your nationality?" an Arab will answer "Egyptian", "Moroccan" etc. Nor is the Arab world congruent with the Muslim world—the semi-arid area occupied by the Arabs, Turks, Persians, and Indo-Afghans, including parts of tropical Asia and even Black Africa. Some parts of the Arab world are not Muslim (e.g. parts of Lebanon and Sudan). Nor are the Arabs all of one racial origin.

Nevertheless, it is said that imperialism and before that colonialism disrupted an organic evolving unity of the Arab nation; its defeat and removal will allow for the unification of the Arab nation. What is the material basis of the Arab nation and should the Arab working class seek to incorporate it into its programme of permanent revolution in the Middle East?

The original Arabs were an ancient people of the Gulf peninsula. From early times quite different paths of evolution were taken by northern and southern Arabia. The latter, the present day Yemen, was a settled civilisation with extensive irrigation systems and an important role in trade between Egypt, Africa and India. In the north the desert was scattered with oases and crossed by caravan routes carrying long distance trade from the Persian Gulf and bringing India and China into connection with Syria, Egypt and Europe.

The nomads and merchants of the northern and western part of the peninsular welded the area into a state for the first time under the merchant prophet-ruler Mohammed (AD 571-632). The subsequent Arab conquests resulted in a vast Arab empire or Caliphate which reached its maximum extent about 732 AD. This did not involve a mass settlement of Arabs within these countries but their conquest by a small

military-religious elite. Throughout most of these areas they were welcomed by the Christian and Jewish population as deliverers from Byzantine Orthodoxy. They did not "convert by the sword" as their western detractors claimed. Instead they imposed a tax on non-Muslims which gradually converted ever larger numbers to Islam.

The spread of the Arabic language was via the great trading cities, Damascus and Baghdad. Here Arabic gradually absorbed or replaced previous closely related Semitic languages (Aramaic in Syria). The pre-existing populations were Arabised and Islamicised whilst of course transmitting to the erstwhile nomads all the riches of Persian, Syrian, Hellenistic and Egyptian civilisation.

The unification of the southern Mediterranean world, the Levant and the whole fertile crescent with Persia greatly stimulated mercantile activity and with it luxury goods production in the great trading cities. Within this system were also included the river irrigation societies of Mesopotamia and Egypt (Asiatic mode of production). The Caliphate rapidly took on the fundamental features of Asiatic despotism.

The unitary Caliphate lasted for scarce a century before the Spanish and North African portions split away. Oriental despotism based on the tribute of the peasants of Egypt and Mesopotamia replaced the Arab-merchant class. The relative weakening of the mercantile basis of the empire led to its subdivision. Yet Arabic as a language and a culture continued to spread. In fact it was only from the 12th century that it became the majority language in countries like Egypt. Whilst an Arab culture—embracing poetry, philosophy, music, art, architecture and mathematics, far more developed than that of medieval Europe existed—it did not mean that an Arab nation with national consciousness (nationalism) had come into being. This explains why the submission of the Caliphate, its repeated fragmentation and its rule by Turks, Kurds, Berbers, Mongols, Arcassians, in no

case provoked a *national* or *Arab* uprising.

By the sixteenth century feudal Europe was pregnant with capitalism. Merchant capital was developing apace in Italy, Portugal, Holland, England and Spain. Consequent naval developments displaced the overland caravan routes and the Mediterranean by round Africa routes. The Arab east robbed of its mercantile prosperity sank into backwardness and economic decline. The Ottoman Empire after two centuries of glory also declined and fragmented under the strain. By the early nineteenth century the new capitalist states France and Britain had begun to penetrate the Arab world seeking to control the trade routes for their capitalist goods to pass eastwards and seeking areas for colonial settlement.

It can be seen from the above that though there was a linguistically Arab Caliphate from the mid-seventh century, by the mid-tenth century the Caliph was Persian and a hundred years later a Turkish sultan ruled the "Arab" world which was in any case fragmenting. The less than three hundred years of a unified Arab state clearly has enormous historic importance for modern twentieth century Arab nationalism but it does not follow that it actually was an *Arab nation state* subsequently divided by foreign oppressors or by "western imperialists".

It was in fact the irruption of the forces of French and British capitalism spearheaded by Napoleon's armies and Nelson's fleet at the turn of the nineteenth century that announced a new phase of development for the Middle East. British rule in Egypt in the nineteenth century was aimed at restricting its independence from the Ottoman Empire (which needed to be preserved as a bulwark against Russia) and at penetrating its economy in the first place through control over the Suez Canal.

Pushing the government into debt led to resistance. But this was crushed in the 1880s and Egypt became a disguised colony of Britain and was essential to her communications to India and East Africa. While the "Uprising of 1919" made the British declare Egypt "independent" it included the reservation that British troops be stationed in Egypt, that Sudan remain in British hands, that Europeans retain their extra-territorial rights. In short Egypt's independence was nominal.

Economically Egypt served as a market for British manufactured goods and a cotton plantation to serve the mills of Lancashire. A colonial bourgeoisie developed but one heavily tied to the large landowners which were the product of earlier land reforms. The Wafd became the party of this bourgeoisie. Saad Zaghloul founded the Wafd Party at the end of the First World War. Ideologically, it represented a nationalist modernist response of this most developed Arab country. It strove by constitutional means to persuade the British and the King to admit them to office and to make political and economic concessions. Wartime economic prosperity had stimulated

the growth of an urban middle class—lawyers, doctors, academics, journalists and civil servants—which formed the basis of radical opposition to the British.

The other mass force was the "Society of Muslim Brothers" founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. It demanded the expulsion of the British by mass action and individual terrorism. It wanted a totally Islamic society and was fiercely anti-communist. At its peak it had nearly half a million members. Thus Egypt remained until the 1950s a country dominated by either Egyptian nationalism or Islamic fundamentalism.

Despite worthless promises to Arab leaders from Britain, following the 1914-18 war, the imperialists of Britain and France carved up the region under the deceitful cover of the League of Nations Mandates. The Al Husseini family were bought off with Feisal being made King of Iraq; Abdullah was made Emir of Transjordan and Hussein recognised as King of the Hejaz. Thus the feudal Bedouin chieftains proved their complete inability to lead an Arab national movement or to create an Arab state even of the Mashreq. They proved themselves over the following decades complete tools of British imperialism. The dialectic of development was such that pre-imperialist domination could not produce the political cement for nationhood whereas imperialist domination integrated the Arab world into the world economy at the cost of Balkanisation and division.

The imperialist carve up of the Arab world was now complete. The Balkanisation of the Middle East after the First World War as a result of the defeat and collapse of the Ottoman Empire created artificial nation states as political entities; the forced development of subordinate colonial and semi-colonial capitalism, however, gave these nation states an economic content, eventually creating (weak) national bourgeoisies. Imperialism inserted the separate nation states into the system of world economy differently and separately, further dislocating their ties with each other.

The speed, brutality and deceitfulness of this process and the impact of harsh and arrogant occupation plus the Zionist project in Palestine all stimulated anti-imperialist sentiment and struggle. The origins of secular Arab nationalism lie in Syria. Disillusionment with the Turkish revolution of 1908 and repulsion from its consciously Turkish nationalism inspired the first groups of Arab nationalists in Syria. In 1913 an Arab National Congress was held in Paris. When the First World War broke out the British set about engineering an "Arab revolt" against the Ottomans who were allied to Germany. This involved stimulating Arab nationalism. It also involved deceiving the Arab forces as to Anglo-French (and Russian) designs on the Middle East.

Arab nationalism as an ideology of the urban petit bourgeoisie linked to these struggles really developed in the 1920s and '30s. Its main representatives were

Amin al Rihani, Edmond Rabbath, Sami Shawkat, and Sati al Husri. Insurrectionary struggle wracked Syria from 1925 to 1927 and Palestine from 1936 to 1938. Previously vague feelings of identity based on language and religious culture developed into a shared experience of exploitation, domination and revolt against these. Economic development and the creation of modern state machines created a new and educated middle class. The role of the radio, newspapers and books helped to activate the common bond of the Arabic language and spread modern ideas—secular nationalism, socialism, communism and fascism in these classes.

But before the foundation of the Zionist state, therefore, pan-Arabist nationalism remained a distinctly minority current out paced by Islamic fundamentalism/pan-Islamism on the right, by regional nationalism (Egyptian or Greater Syrian) and by Stalinism on the left. It was the catastrophe of the first Arab-Israeli war and the humiliation it involved for all the adjacent Arab states that launched Arab nationalism into a mass force—one that was to dominate the Arab world from the early 1950s to the end of the 1960s.

Nasserism and the "Arab Revolution"

The loss of the 1948-49 war discredited all the bourgeois politicians of Egypt. It is not surprising that it was in the army that this humiliation was most keenly felt. In Egypt a coup came in 1952. Its organising force was the Free Officers movement within which the leading figure was Gamal Abdul Nasser. From a lower petit bourgeois background, Nasser was an undogmatic nationalist determined to rid Egypt of the British and help his country on the road to development. Over the next decade he pragmatically and eclectically espoused pan-Arabism and the statified economy as the road to development. The only major immediate social measure was a sweeping land reform creating a sizeable kulak class—a solid social basis for Egyptian Bonapartism.

In 1954 Nasser forced the British to agree to a two year evacuation plan from the Suez Canal. In addition he refused to join a US organised cold war alliance of Arab states against the USSR. He wanted to stand between the two blocs but took advantage of the willingness of the USSR to give aid to "non-aligned" countries. US and British resistance to the Aswan Dam project forced Nasser to nationalise the Suez Canal to use its revenues to pay for the dam. Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt but Arab resistance, USSR support for her and the hostility of US imperialism to Britain's unilateral actions (which threatened to bring down the USA's system of alliances) led to France and Britain's defeat and withdrawal. In this conflict it was correct for revolutionaries to have pursued a defeatist policy in France and Britain, to have demanded unconditional arms

from the USSR for Egypt and no reliance on or support for US imperialism.

Nasser's triumph was such as no Arab statesman has ever achieved. A hundred years of humiliation for the Egyptian and Arab peoples was signally avenged. For the next eleven years Nasserism was the overwhelming influence in the Arab world. Nasser's prestige as the leader of the Egyptian revolution spread to the whole Arab world. For over a decade Nasser was to seem to millions the embodiment of the Arab revolution. Egypt under his leadership seemed fated to achieve the united Arab state and break the influence not only of the weakened and humbled British but also the new hegemonic influence, the USA.

Arab nationalism rapidly developed in the most important Arab states. In Syria after fusing with Akrain Hourani's Socialist Party the Ba'athists became the most dynamic political force. Once the predominant force within the government the Ba'athists proposed a union between Egypt and Syria. Nasser hesitated but as leader of the "Arab revolution" he could hardly refuse. The United Arab Republic (UAR) came into being (1958) with a new Bonapartist constitution and Nasser as president. Arab nationalism was at its zenith.

But the conditions that created Egyptian Bonapartism—a land reform that wiped out the big landlords and benefited the rich peasant (*fellaheen*), the discredited and split forces of opposition whether Islamic, Stalinist or conservative bourgeois—did not exist in Syria. The Syrian Ba'athists had expected Nasser to rule Syria through them. Speedily undeceived they passed into opposition. Also a bitter feud erupted between the UAR and Iraq which struck a damaging blow to the hopes of expanding the union of Arab States.

Meanwhile faced by imperialist hostility and economic boycott Nasser resorted to a series of far-reaching nationalisations and state capitalist measures totally in keeping with his Bonapartist regime. He wished to stimulate (capitalist) development but not to strengthen the hostile bourgeoisie with its many links to British, French and US imperialism. He nationalised cotton export firms, banks and finance institutions and 275 major industrial firms. A further land reform broadened his base in the peasantry.

The application of these measures to Syria, a country with a stronger urban and rural bourgeoisie alienated the right. The communists were already hostile so Nasser succeeded in setting all the possessing and politically influential classes against him. In September 1961 a coup toppled the Egyptian satraps and the first experiment in Arab unity collapsed.

In the aftermath of this fiasco Nasser was obliged to resort to socialist demagoguery to cloak his Bonapartist-state capitalist regime. He declared Arab socialism to be the embodiment of social democracy. He created the Arab Socialist Union as a mass organisa-

tion. From September 1962 he threw his efforts into supporting the struggle in the Yemen against reactionary forces and in Aden against the British. In 1963 the Syrian and Iraqi Ba'athists came to hold sole power and, albeit cautiously, declared their support for Egypt's campaign against the reactionary regimes of the Arabian peninsula. Once more as in 1958-61 the Arab revolution seemed on the move headed by military officers professing nationalist and socialist ideologies. Unity discussions again started. This time they broke down in bitter mutual recriminations.

After this failure Nasser had to return to the framework of the Arab League and to talks with the pro-imperialist conservative regimes. In August 1965 he even made his peace directly with King Feisal. Soon he was being outflanked by the Syrian Ba'athists whose radical wing had seized power and was supporting a new Palestinian guerilla organisation, Al Fatah, which began a campaign against Israel in 1965. Israeli counter-attacks drove Syria and Egypt into a joint military command in case of war and the latter promised assistance to Syria in case of attack.

Israeli reprisals against Jordan for harbouring Al Fatah led to Hussein demanding that mighty Egypt cease hiding behind UN troops and close the straights to the Israeli port of Eilat. Nasser did so to avoid losing face. Jordan signed a joint defence pact with Egypt. The Arab world was in a state of great excitement. United action against Israel by both "revolutionary nationalist" and traditionalist states seemed imminent. The unity of the Arab nation would perhaps soon be forged in the heat of a victorious war against the Zionist intruder. But despite all the rhetorical threats no attack was planned. Instead it was Israel who struck first.

The Six Day War against Egypt in 1967 was aimed as a double blow against the Palestinian resistance and Nasser's refusal to subordinate Egypt, to the wishes of US imperialism. In this it had the same essential features of the 1973 war. In both conflicts it was necessary to be defeatist inside Israel and critically support Egypt, Syria and Jordan in the military conflict, whilst at the same time struggling for the right of the Palestinians to self-determination even against the wishes of the Arab states.

The war in early June was a total, humiliating and crushing blow for Nasserism and Arab nationalism as the ideology of the military-Bonapartist regimes of the major Arab states. In 1948-9 Arabs had been able to blame the incompetent corrupt semi-feudal regimes in hock to imperialism as the cause of their defeat. All the political achievements of Nasserism and Ba'athism suddenly proved hollow and the impotence of these forces to unite the Arab world and confront Zionism, let alone imperialism, were cruelly demonstrated. Henceforth attention would turn to a different quarter, to the Palestinians and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).

Palestinian nationalism and the PLO

The soil from which a specifically Palestinian nationalism could grow existed in the mandate period among the intelligentsia within the merchant (mainly Christian) Arab population. It developed a highly westernised outlook with their newspapers and periodicals playing a leading role in the campaign to resist Zionism and in the developing of a Palestinian and Arab national consciousness.

Among the key external factors in developing this was the British imperialists refusal to grant Palestine's inhabitants self-determination or self government and the separation in 1918 of Palestine from Syria (a French Mandate) and from Transjordan (a British puppet monarchy). Trade routes were disrupted as a result and the economy decisively reoriented by the Mandate government. Cash crops for export came to dominate the most fertile area—the coastal plain. Citrus fruit exports, largely to Britain, increased enormously.

No less important was the effect of the Zionist colonisation. By 1935 Jewish organisations and individuals owned 12% of the total arable land. Given the impoverished minifundia of the Arab population, burdened with debt and unable to afford irrigation, machinery and fertiliser to increase productivity the Arab peasantry's land hunger became ever more intense.

These external pressures, allied to the destruction of pre-capitalist social relations, created the basis for the birth of a national consciousness amongst the Arab Palestinian population. Until the unmasking of pan-Arabist movements such as Nasserism, however, a specifically Palestinian nationalism was muted.

Today, the PLO has become the umbrella organisation including all the major forces in struggle against Zionism for Palestinian national self-determination. As an alliance of mass political, cultural and military organisations it has become the centre for national resistance, performing the role of a surrogate state throughout the Palestinian diaspora.

It has armed forces, a parliament and a "government" but it is sovereign in no definite territorial area: and in the last analysis it depends on the support or toleration of the other Arab states. Set up by Nasser and the Arab regimes in 1964, the "official" PLO under Ahmad Shukeiry was unable even to establish its hegemony over the Palestinian masses and remained a pliant tool of the neighbouring bourgeois Arab states. In fact Shukeiry was rapidly outflanked by the growth of Fatah (the Palestinian National Liberation Movement), which gained in popularity after launching its first guerrilla strike on Israel in 1965, Fatah eventually took control of the PLO in 1969.

Fatah was founded with financial backing from the exiled Palestinian bourgeoisie. It reversed the previous strategic schema—first pan-Arab liberation,

then Palestinian freedom. Given the manifest failure of Egypt and Syria in 1967 and given the successful guerrilla struggles of the 1960s—the FLN in Algeria, the NLF in Vietnam, the July 26th Movement in Cuba, Fatah proposed a similar struggle to destabilise and internally disrupt the Zionist state. Attacks were to be launched from the neighbouring states—Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Revolutionary communists (Trotskyists) are opposed to a *strategy* of guerrilla warfare for the following reasons. Our strategy is the mobilisation of the urban and rural masses under the leadership of the working class. To withdraw from production, from the towns and cities and even from the most densely populated agricultural districts the most fearless fighters, to concentrate their activity solely on military combat training is to deprive an oppressed people and exploited classes of their cadres for direct mass action. It denudes and weakens economic and political struggle in favour of military action which by and large is episodic and desultory. Thus while the PLO factions set up armed militias based on the camps for twenty years or more they neglected the organisation and mobilisation of the Palestinians within the Zionist state. The result is to create an elite of trained fighters not a vanguard of mass struggle.

In fact the PLO and Fatah were never able to develop guerrilla warfare on a mass scale or penetrate the Zionist state except on daring, but always suicidal, missions. The one victory Fatah won, in 1968, was fought on Jordanian soil (Karameh) where they repulsed an attack by Israeli raiding forces against a refugee camp. Moreover since the guerrilla groups depend for their finance and their base of operations on bourgeois Arab regimes, both conservative and "radical", it has repeatedly been restricted, disciplined and indeed expelled and disarmed by these regimes. In addition it has been pressured into repeated attempts at diplomatic solutions. Fatah, with the closest links to its Saudi and Gulf backers, has repeatedly proved amenable to these projects.

The limitations of this bourgeois nationalist strategy were tragically revealed in Jordan during 1970. The strength of the PLO having extended beyond the Palestinian camps into the very institutions of the Jordanian state, ferocious attacks by the Hashemite regime. Despite a general strike and widespread calls for the overthrow of the monarchy, Fatah's policy of "non-interference" and express support for the Jordanian-Palestinian bourgeoisie of the Kingdom caused them to attempt the demobilisation of the Palestinian and Jordanian masses in the face of Hussein's assault. The resultant massacre of 2-3,000 Palestinian fighters (Black September) must be seen as a direct result of this strategy of dependence and alliance on the Arab regimes.

One organisation within the PLO which, at least in words, rejects the principle of non-interference is the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Founded by former leaders of the Arab National Movement, most prominent among them being George Habash, the PFLP evolved quickly in the direction of Stalinism. Though it argued for the resistance itself to seize power in Jordan in 1970, given the political leadership of the movement this could only be taken as a call for the establishment of a democratic bourgeois regime. Indeed the PFLP is totally committed to the Stalinist "stages" theory which limits the immediate goal of the national struggle to the realisation of democratic demands. No established tendency in the Palestinian movement was fighting in 1970 for a revolution in Jordan which would have required councils of worker, peasant and soldier delegates to take power. Thus a decisive opportunity was missed in striking a real blow at imperialism and its local agents.

Despite inclusion in its programme of the need for a "revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party", the PFLP has not adopted a strategy of organising the Palestinian workers for mass struggle against Zionism. Indeed it sank, after Black September, into a despairing petit bourgeois strategy of individual terror, initiating a wave of hi-jackings and hostage seizures. Whilst unconditionally defending from state repression those militants who adopt such methods Trotskyists reject and fight against the adoption of these forms of struggle because they are completely ineffective for promoting the victory of the national liberation struggle and because they condemn the masses to the role of passive by-stander rather than the instrument of their own liberation.

The failure of the PLO's strategy to yield results, together with the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza following the 1967 war, spurred the growth within the PLO of support for the formation of a Palestinian state on the newly occupied territories; such a "mini-state" was to exist alongside the Zionist state itself.

Between 1967 and 1973 the Popular Democratic Front For the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP)—later known simply as DFLP—which was a split from the PFLP and led by Naif Hawatmeh, argued for the West Bank to become a liberated zone, free of Israeli troops and no longer under Jordanian tutelage. Under the impact of the defeat in the 1973 war the idea was transformed by Fatah into that of a "mini-state". Despite the opposition of the DFLP to Fatah's increasing reliance on the Arab regimes, the mini-state policy has led directly to manoeuvres with "democratic" imperialism, the Arab bourgeoisie, the United Nations and the USSR—all in an attempt to persuade the Zionists to grant limited autonomy to the West Bank and Gaza.

All consistent advocates of self-determination for the Palestinians must reject this slogan as a reactionary dead end for the struggle for national liberation. A quasi-Bantustan, economically and militarily

dominated by Israel, is an attractive prospect for those powers seeking to "stabilise" the situation in the region by diverting and undermining the prospects for any sustained anti-imperialist revolt.

Support for this within the PLO stems to a large extent from layers keen to appropriate the power and the material benefits of office. For the Palestinian masses such a solution would be a betrayal of their just aspiration to return to their homeland as free and equal citizens of a non-confessional and democratic state. To date only the Palestinian Communist Party has taken the line of compromise and retreat to its logical conclusion and recognised the state of Israel's right to exist. Since the decision of Hussein of Jordan to renounce his claim to the West Bank the PLO has signalled further preparedness to recognise the state of Israel and seek a political settlement based on a West Bank state. Any future election of a Labour Party government in Israel may well accelerate the PLO's abandonment and betrayal of the Palestinian's legitimate goal of a state in the whole of Palestine.

Opposition to the mini-state has in the past been led by a "Rejection Front" of Palestinian organisations, most prominent among them being the PFLP. Yet this attitude remains only slightly more progressive than the position of Fatah and the DFLP. All Palestinian organisations (except for the Islamic Jihad) whether "realist" or "rejectionist" support the PLO's central slogan of a "Democratic Secular State" in Palestine. Our objection to this slogan does not lie principally in its ambiguity (allowing several interpretations including that of a mini-state) still less in its clearly progressive aspect in prescribing no confessional basis for a future state in Palestine.

Our objection lies in the absence of any indication of *which class* in Palestinian society is capable of overthrowing Zionism and *which class* must predominate in the future state. When all the ideological trappings of religious and national mythology are stripped away, every state remains an instrument of coercion in the hands of a particular class in order to defend its particular property relations. The question of the class character of the Palestinian republic cannot be left wrapped in deceitful phrases.

It is only the proletariat backed by the peasantry and sections of the urban petit bourgeoisie which has the power to smash the Zionist state. In that process it must ensure that there is no return to the domination of the imperialists over the economy, its

banking and agricultural sectors. The demand for a democratic secular state remains at the level of ideology utterly utopian and in practical terms would lead to a capitalist Palestine. Such a state would find itself from the first day in the vice-like grip of imperialism just as every Arab state does today.

Whilst the PLO will be an important arena from which militants and cadres of a future revolutionary party of the Palestinian workers will be assembled, it is nevertheless a "popular front" of varied class forces wedded to bourgeois nationalist ideology and dominated by the agents of the Palestinian and Arab bourgeoisies. It must be supplanted, politically and organisationally, if the Palestinian revolution is to move forward to final victory.

Because of the failure of the PLO to advance the cause of self-determination Palestinian nationalism is increasingly being challenged for hegemony of the masses within the West Bank and Gaza by Islamic fundamentalism. Any moves to recognise Israel by the PLO will allow the Islamics to pose as intransigent enemies of Israel and gain credibility thereby.

This movement finds its inspiration from the Iranian revolution which brought down the Shah. In the refugee camps of Gaza, as in Lebanon, the spread of Islamic influence depends as much on the provision of funds and other supplies, as on any liberatory vision that the fundamentalists are able to conjure up. In reality, Islamic fundamentalism has a reactionary ideology which embraces anti-Semitism. This has led the Israeli state to encourage the growth of the Islamic groups to lend credence to their repressive policy and to divide the Palestinian resistance.

The goal of an Islamic republic for the Palestinians would spell disaster for the Jews as it would for the mass of Palestinians.

The present example of the state of Iran is testimony to this; as with Iran an Islamic republic in Palestine would involve the enslavement of women, the oppression of other religious groups, such as the Christian Arabs and the wholesale denial of the democratic rights of the masses.

While it is possible and necessary to struggle alongside these militants against Israeli repression in the Occupied Territories, a real consistent struggle for democratic rights for the Palestinians involves sharp criticism of the denial of such rights contained within the goals of fundamentalism and a fight to defend and extend such rights even against Islamic militants.

Marxism and and the Jewish Question

Zionist propagandists and their apologists in the labour movement claim that those who fight Zionism are in reality guilty of anti-semitism. In fact only the revolutionary Marxist tradition has combined the struggle against anti-semitism with the consistent defence of the democratic rights of all the peoples of the Middle East

Marx himself was Jewish but came from an assimilated enlightenment background. He had very little sympathy with the old ghetto culture of eastern Jewry. In addition in the early 1840s he identified Judaism as the embodiment of the spirit of capitalism (Christianity was a more impure form of the same thing). This does not mean that Marx was an anti-Semite or a self-hater as Zionist apologists claim. It does mean that neither Marx nor Engels made a "modern" (i.e. scientific materialist) analysis of the Jewish Question.

The reasons for this are simple. Both assumed a straightforward process of assimilation of the Jews as capitalism developed. Jewish culture was for them a medieval fossil, a reactionary left-over that would melt away into modern bourgeois culture. Marx died just at the moment that modern anti-Semitism was being born. Engels and his German Social Democratic disciples condemned it as "the socialism of fools", that is, a fake demagogic "anti-capitalism". In this spirit the Second International in its early years condemned "anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism alike"; it condemned incipient Zionism as well as the Tsarist pogroms and the anti-Dreyfus reactionaries. Jean Jaures and Rosa Luxemburg both advocated an active labour movement involvement in the struggle against anti-Semitism. Yet the Marxist analysis of the Jewish question and Zionism was only to be effectively grounded with the work of Lenin, Kautsky and later Trotsky.

Lenin's attitude to the Jewish Question was forged in conflict with the leaders of the Jewish Bund. Founded in 1897 it began in the 1890s as a movement amongst the Jewish workers living in Poland under the Tsar's rule (the "Pale"). The Bund did oppose Zionism as a reactionary utopia. That is they demanded the full political emancipation of the Jews in Russia as part of the labour movement's struggle against Tsarism. But at the historic Second Congress of the RSDLP the Bund opposed the view of a centralised party for the whole Russian Empire.

Lenin opposed the idea of a *federal* party consisting of politically autonomous sections. Instead he proposed that the Bund should carry out agitation and propaganda in the Yiddish language amongst the communities of Jewish workers within the "Pale" but as a section of the RSDLP subject to its congresses and leading bodies. In addition Lenin advocated the right of Russia's "nationalities" to self determination and secession if they so wished and the free use and exercise of their language in state schools and public life as a method of fighting all national oppression. Lenin's objective was not to create a patchwork quilt of nations as a positive goal but to end national oppression as a dividing factor between the proletariats of all nations. Only if the proletariat actively fought against privilege, coercion and fraud could it achieve this.

The Bund however claimed exclusive rights to organise Jewish workers throughout the Russian Empire even where they were a tiny minority. The Russian and other nationalities they would leave to other socialists. This led them to espouse the Austro-Marxist programme of "national-cultural autonomy"—uniting the scattered Jews by demanding separate schools and cultural institutions. Lenin rejected this as a positive espousal of nationalism, calling the Bund "nationalist socialists". Trotsky never dissented from Lenin's view.

The Bosheviks conducted a ceaseless struggle against the Black Hundreds and the instigators of pogroms, advocating and organising defence squads. Lenin explained the specific oppression of the Jewish workers and its consequence, the necessity for the closest unity between the workers of all nationalities. In this context he was a remorseless foe of Otto Bauer's slogan of "national-cultural autonomy" as tending to unify each proletariat with "its own" bourgeoisie and separate it from its class brothers and sisters of other nationalities.

Lenin insisted that Marxists must base themselves

on the "international culture of democracy and the world working class movement". This is not an abstract non-national culture but one which takes "from each national culture *only* its democratic and socialist elements; we take them *only* and *absolutely* in opposition to the bourgeois nationalism of *each* nation".

Thus though the Jews are in Lenin's words "the most oppressed and persecuted nation" the slogan of national culture even for them "is the slogan of the rabbis and the bourgeoisie". Worse, it tends to become the glorification of the results of oppression for in Russia and Galicia (north east Austria-Hungary), "backward and semi-barbarous countries" the Jews are "forcibly kept in the status of a caste". Lenin points to the other side of Jewish culture where the Jews have won emancipation. "There the great world-progressive features of Jewish culture stand clearly revealed; its internationalism, its identification with the advanced movements of the epoch." (*Critical Remarks on the National Question*)

Lenin was therefore a consistent integrationist. But he was absolutely opposed to any forced assimilation to the Russian nationality or to any cultural or linguistic privileges for a dominant or majority nation or language. With regard to minority and oppressed peoples he was in favour of full assistance and facilities for their unhindered cultural and linguistic life. The working class organisations however had to integrate the democratic and proletarian components of these cultures into a common international culture which transcended all nationalistic philistinism and exclusiveness *even of the oppressed peoples*.

Karl Kautsky devoted a work, *Race and Judaism* (1914), to the Jewish question. Kautsky located the social roots of anti-Semitism in the despairing petit bourgeoisie, ground down by big capital in industry, trade and banking but unable to fight capitalism as a whole because of their own umbilical cord of private property. Kautsky before 1914 held that "the Jews in Galicia and Russia are more of a caste than a nation and attempts to constitute Jewry as a nation are attempts at presenting a caste".

Moreover in the countries where they have been totally politically emancipated the process of assimilation is going on apace either through intermarriage and secularisation or through the development of Judaism into a religion and nothing else. Kautsky goes on to show that the project of settlement in Palestine is a utopia.

Here his argument is at its weakest because he underestimates and ignores two related facts; the oppression of the Jews by the Russian state, by anti-Semitic pogromists and the erecting of racist immigration laws by the "advanced" democracies which were creating and would increasingly create an enormous pressure for "exodus". Secondly, imperialism itself had a use for emigrant populations. It

had historically used them as a supplementary reserve army of labour in the independent countries themselves and to settle and hold valuable colonies. This latter task came to predominate in the later 19th century and in this century, especially in South Africa and Rhodesia where vital raw materials (gold, diamonds, copper etc) had to be safeguarded against the "natives".

Kautsky, who before 1914 had adopted a tolerant, conciliationist attitude to the Austro-Marxist position on nationalities therefore tended towards a more positive attitude to nationalisms than did Lenin. In the case of the Jews he insisted they were *not* a nation. Lenin was never so dogmatic and sometimes called them a nation, nationality or people. For Kautsky a positive attitude flowed from the very fact of national existence. For Lenin and Trotsky the problem was how to overcome the obstacles to internationalism that any form of oppression—racial, national or religious—posed.

Trotsky, though Jewish himself, came from a Russian speaking family and had no experience with the specifically Jewish labour movement. Only in the 1930s did he devote special attention to the question having on his own admission hitherto assumed that once backward semi-feudal Tsarism had been swept away the Jews would be painlessly assimilated into modern democratic society. By the 1930s he was obliged to recognise that imperialism—the highest stage of capitalism, the epoch of its death agony—was reviving anti-Semitism.

The *Transitional Programme* pledged the Fourth International (FI) and its sections to "an uncompromising disclosure of the roots of race prejudice and all forms and shades of national arrogance and chauvinism, particularly anti-Semitism" as part of the "daily work" of the FI's sections. Thus the SWP(US) mounted a vigorous campaign against the racist immigration quotas and for the slogan "Open the gates!" to the Jewish refugees from Hitler before, during and after the war.

However, Trotsky remained an intransigent opponent of Zionism. Palestine he called "a tragic mirage" and pointed out that the development of military events between British and German imperialism—i.e. a Nazi victory—"may well transform Palestine into a bloody trap for several hundred thousand Jews". In the short term this fear was not realised though Trotsky's other prediction that the war would bring with it the question of "the physical extermination of the Jews" was amply grounded.

After the war the FI continued Trotsky's strategy of fighting for the admission of Jewish refugees into all the imperialist countries who still—despite the holocaust maintained their racist immigration laws and quotas. In addition the FI stood by the struggle of the Arab masses against Zionist chauvinism and the project of creating a Jewish state by robbing the Palestinian majority of the best agricultural land and

the major economic resources of the country. It condemned the utopian and reactionary character of Zionism.

It was reactionary because its idea of autarchic economic development for Jewish Palestine was impossible in the context of capitalism in its death agony (here the FI was wrong at least for a whole period but this was a general problem of perspectives). It could never be able to outgrow the Arab population of the country and the region by Jewish immigration alone. It would be entirely dependent on the big imperialist powers, a pawn in their play for control of the Arab world.

Lastly it could be no answer to anti-Semitism which is rooted in capitalism in the imperialist epoch. Its *reactionary* nature was to be seen in its *pro-imperialist* role; because it racially divides the Jewish and Arab workers and fuels the latter's subordination to their own bourgeois and feudal exploiters by means of nationalism; because it weakens the agrarian struggle of the Arab peasants by diverting it against the Zionist land-grabbers and away from the feudal landowners (*Effendis*). Last but not least on a world scale it diverts Jewish proletarians away from participating in the class struggle where they live towards fantasies of immigration.

The FI defended the right to self-determination of the whole population of Palestine and called for the

expulsion of the British and the convocation of a sovereign democratic constituent assembly to decide all questions including the right of immigration and its control.

After the war, however, the FI wrongly took a position of defeatism on both sides in the "war of independence" of 1948-49. They did so mainly because during the period of economic prosperity during the Second World War there had been growing incidences of united working class action between Jewish and Arab workers in Palestine.

They believed that the "war of independence", led by the Zionists on one side and the semi-feudal landowners of the Arab League on the other, represented a reactionary diversion from the class struggle of the Jewish and Arab workers.

In reality these special conditions of the Second World War were bound to collapse and with it the fragile basis of unity and integration. The FI underestimated the importance of the imperialist backed offensive in the region and the revolutionary-democratic struggle against Zionism as part of the class struggle.

It would have been essential to have agitated for armed self-defence committees in the Arab villages and towns; for military co-ordination with the forces of the Arab League without giving any political support for their own annexationist goals.

Programme of Action for Palestine

The starting point for a revolutionary party's programme in Palestine and the surrounding countries must be the struggle against imperialism and its wide variety of local agents. The world-hegemonic imperialist power—the USA with its fleets in the Mediterranean and the Gulf defends "its" oil and the semi-feudal rentier regimes it props up in the Arabian peninsula with a limitless arsenal. Yet as its ignominious fiasco in Iran and its inglorious retreat from Lebanon shows it is far from invincible when the masses are roused against it even under the most appalling leadership. This "leadership" whether Stalinist, bourgeois nationalist or clerical reactionary can however only score partial and limited victories against the USA and its agents.

Militarily the Israeli state is a formidable supple-

ment to the forces of imperialism, socially and economically rooted as it is within the region. But its massive strength derives ultimately from the huge economic support given it by the US and European imperialist bourgeoisies and the Zionist bourgeoisie world wide. Whilst it acts as an agent of imperialism as a whole in dividing and disciplining the Arab world it has its own projects and interests that clash from time to time with the projects of one or other of the imperialist powers—even with those of the USA.

So essential to the USA is the existence of the Zionist state that it is repeatedly forced to adapt its overall strategy and tactics for controlling the region to the wishes of its Israeli ally. Most frequently undermined and sabotaged are its relations with its Arab clients (Mubarak, Hussein and the Saudi rulers) who

it is repeatedly obliged to abandon and swindle.

The world strategic interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and its ability and willingness to give military and economic aid (armaments, advisers and loans) have enabled various bourgeois Bonapartist regimes (Nasser, Assad, Hussein, Gaddafi) to play the anti-imperialist and even defy the USA tactically for a whole period. In turn these regimes have influenced and moulded the PLO through its various factions.

Yet these bourgeois nationalist Bonapartes, despite all their anti-imperialist and even "socialist" demagoguery, despite their claims and aspirations to unify the "Arab nation" or Islam against the "yankee" and Zionist menace have repeatedly surrendered to them at the decisive moment. In reality they are competitors to Israel for imperialism's favours.

What are the real anti-imperialist objectives facing the proletariat of the Middle East? Who are its allies and who are its enemies? What demands must it take up both in its own interest and to win to its side these allies? Its open enemies and their slavish semi-colonial puppets are clear enough to millions although illusions may exist in the Japanese and EEC imperialists who from time to time, jackal-like, try to seize some morsel from under the nose of the US lion by playing up their own "moderation" and "peaceable" nature.

Whilst it is legitimate to take tactical advantage of any contradictions within the imperialist camp, to entertain any illusions in for example Britain, France, Italy or Germany—old plunderers or would-be plunderers of the Middle East and architects of its Balkanisation—could lead only to defeat and catastrophe. Nor should the workers' movement entertain any illusions in the Stalinist or social democratic lackeys of these imperialisms when they weep crocodile tears over the wrongs of the Palestinians.

Labour, Socialist and Social Democratic leaders have long supported and encouraged the Zionists and feted their "labour" leaders in the Socialist International—that below-stairs version of their masters big "thieves kitchen", the United Nations. In neither and through neither will the masses of the Middle East see their violated national rights redressed.

Nor can the bourgeoisie and the military caste of the Arab states which temporarily resist direct imperialist control or its dictates, provide the leadership of a successful struggle against imperialism. Firstly, neither Nasser and Sadat nor Assad were able to defeat the Israeli armies, backed as they were by US economic aid. Leaving aside their ability as strategists Egypt and Syria alone or together were not economically or militarily able to overcome the Zionist forces. 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 have all proved that Israel cannot be defeated from without, by conventional military means and that the bourgeois Arab generals cannot lead the Arab masses to victory.

Still less can the battle cries of Islam and the clergy unite the Arab world in a successful *jihad*. Their reac-

tionary utopian political slogans will alienate all the minority national and religious communities of the region and repulse women who have nothing to hope from them except a return to medieval conditions.

The working class alone can provide the solid social force capable of sustaining a real revolutionary party which can lead all the dispossessed and impoverished—the poor farmers, the camp dwellers, the sub-proletariat of the huge cities, the self-sacrificing intelligentsia in an assault on imperialism and all its agents—Arab as well as Zionist.

The first step is to create the nuclei of revolutionary parties, independent of all bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces not tied to any strategic deals with the exploiters and oppressors of the working class. Class independence is the beginning of all wisdom. From the 1930s onwards the powerful influence of Stalinism with its strategy of the popular front and the revolution by stages has led the proletariats of Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Iraq to various Bonapartist dictators or petit bourgeois parties or fronts, demanding first national liberation and a popular democratic regime, then at a later stage socialism.

The working class and its immediate and historic needs have been sacrificed on the altars of these false gods. In the "independent" Arab states the proletariat has seen its trade unions and political parties repeatedly crushed and its best fighters martyred by "anti-imperialist heroes" whose standing amongst the masses was sedulously promoted by the Stalinists.

Against the popular front of class collaboration and betrayal the working class must fight for class independence, for an alliance between the working class and the urban and rural poor organised in "soviets" and for anti-imperialist united fronts of struggle whenever the fight reaches the stage of open conflict. The *united front* must be based on the principle of the right and ability of the workers' parties as well as those of the petit bourgeoisie to organise separately, openly and democratically but to fight together loyally and with iron discipline against the common enemy.

There must be no confusion of programmes and strategy and no suppression of any party's right to express them or to make criticisms of each other. As for the parties or forces tied to the bourgeoisie we cannot expect them to ally with us or to prove a reliable ally should exceptional attacks by imperialism momentarily force them to do so. As for the Arab bourgeois states in conflict with imperialism their "gifts" can be accepted only on the spears' point—that is, with no conditions as to control of the struggle or the leadership of it.

They are the class enemy even when imperialism forces them to seek the proletariat and the peasants as allies. In each separate country the proletariat must seek as its main support the proletariat of the surrounding states and must defend their interests as its own. No "stage" must act as a barrier to the proletari-

iat's advance to power. A workers' state in the Middle East would be a massive blow to imperialism, a reliable arsenal and fortress for all the oppressed. The seizure of power therefore must be the goal of our programme. But to rally the forces and create the conditions to make this possible we must take up all the immediate and partial, the democratic and anti-imperialist demands that are in the interests of the masses.

The Palestinian urban and rural proletariat has shown that it can fight—not only because generations of its bravest youth have taken up arms against Zionism and imperialism in guerrilla struggle and alongside the "regular" forces in the Arab-Israeli wars but also in the mass actions of the 1987-89 uprising on the West Bank.

Guerrilla warfare can never be a *strategy* for victory, despite the justification of guerrilla tactics in certain periods and the need for a defence militia to protect the mass struggle and inflict punishment on the occupiers and aggressors. Whilst the proletariat must defend the heroes of the guerrilla forces it cannot share their strategy which tends to oscillate between negotiations and concessions and individual acts which though heroic are all too often doomed to defeat from the outset.

The proletariat erects its strategy along the path of *mass* action; the demonstration, the strike, the uprising the building of trade unions, workers' and peasants' councils, women's committees and a popular militia. In the present period the key factors that proletarian revolutionists have to address are:

(a) US and European imperialism's attempts to create a disarmed Palestinian mini-state on part or all of the West Bank, under the guardianship of King Hussein.

(b) The commitment of the Fatah majority within the PLO to a West Bank statelet and the recognition of the state of Israel and the abandonment of the struggle against the Zionist state that this would entail.

(c) The uprisings of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Israel proper against Zionism's military brutality and against the appalling conditions under which they live.

(d) The division of the Israeli ruling class with the Likud led forces seeking to sabotage the US-EEC plans and with the Labour Zionists seeking to accomplish the creation of a helpless Bantustan where the "surplus" Arab population can be utilised in the South African fashion to make permanent an Israeli Jewish majority in Israel and keep a pool of cheap Arab labour close at hand.

(e) The continued guerrilla actions of the Palestinian *fedayeen* and the interaction of the whole Israel/Palestine situation with the class struggle and inter-state rivalries of the Arab world.

Revolutionary communists must be prepared to intervene and take united actions with progressive

forces on all these issues but from a strictly independent class standpoint. Thus we should oppose the imperialist project of a West Bank Bantustan.

- No PLO recognition of the Zionist state's right to oppress 650,000 Palestinians. No abandonment of these Palestinians!
- For a united struggle against national oppression. Smash the Zionist state. Support the mass uprisings against Zionist terror and occupation. Broaden it into a struggle against all aspects of national oppression and super-exploitation suffered by Arab workers and peasants!
- Strengthen the organisations of the working class, trade unions and workplace committees. Build workers', village and camp councils to forward the struggle!
- Build a mass defence militia. Down with the Zionist occupation and brutalising of all Palestinian towns, villages and camps. Israeli troops out! Jewish workers who oppose the occupation: do not avoid conscription into the reserve. Organise soldiers against the occupation inside the army. Organise within the army to get units to refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories. In the Territories fight the brutality and politicise the disaffection within the army. Organise rank and file soldiers' committees. Link up with the Palestinian resistance.
- Build fighting unity with all Jewish Israeli organisations willing to defend the democratic rights of the Palestinians and oppose repression. For solidarity wherever possible with the Jewish Israeli proletariat's economic struggles against the bourgeoisie. Defence of their democratic trade union rights. Proletarians of all nationalities unite!
- Critical support for the struggle of the guerrilla organisations against the Zionist state against imperialism and against the treacherous Arab bourgeoisie. For an active defeatist position towards the Zionist state in any conflict with an Arab bourgeois regime. Defencism with regard to both the PLO and the Arab regimes does not and must not signify abandonment of the political struggle against both, preparing the working class for their betrayals and their inability to fight Zionism and imperialism!

At no stage must the working class abandon its struggle to unite and lead all the exploited and oppressed against the Zionist state and to create a workers' state in Palestine which would recognise and defend equality of rights for the Arab and Israeli Jewish nationalities, their language and culture. This can only be achieved by mass struggle, by the disintegration and destruction of the Zionist armed forces, that is, by an insurrection that breaks the ability and will to resist of the Zionists. To achieve this objective the working class and its revolutionary party must take up a whole series of struggles (democratic, trade union, poor peasant) that will rally forces to the workers' side and disintegrate the class alliance of

Zionism.

To win the masses to action one must take up and defend their vital interests here and now whether these interests can be satisfied by the existing state or whether their realisation requires its destruction and indeed the abolition of capitalist ownership of the large scale means of production.

Thus within the whole of the borders of historic Palestine and indeed in the surrounding states where Palestinian refugees live we must fight for a programme of demands to abolish the awful conditions of the camps. This would require a massive *programme of public works* to build decent houses, hospitals, schools and centres for social life and recreation, install running water and sewers, electricity and heating to pave the roads and provide a good public transport service. Who should pay for it? The American, Zionist and European imperialists and Arab millionaire bourgeoisies and feudalists. How to force them—for certainly they will not do so out of the goodness of their hearts? Take action against their businesses in Palestine, throughout the Arab world and summon the proletariats of Europe, the USA and Asia to assist.

This must not be a call for charity but for restitution and recompense for generations of plunder of the Palestinian people. And such a massive public works programme should be under the control of the unions and local committees of the Palestinian workers and camp dwellers. They should plan and execute everything.

The Palestinian workers' unions should fight for full trade union rights and absolute independence from the state. They should be open to all workers who wish to fight for their interests on the basis of class solidarity and oppose national chauvinism and privilege. They should support Jewish workers in every progressive trade union and political struggle they undertake (i.e. for higher wages, against inflation, against rationalisation or austerity measures and in defence of their social welfare gains). In return the Palestinians should demand equal wages and equal social welfare conditions with their Jewish class brothers and sisters. Together they should fight for the full programme of transitional anti-capitalist measures (the sliding scale of wages and hours, against inflation and unemployment, workers' control of production, workers' inspection of all aspects of the economy, nationalisation of industry, commerce and banking etc). They should fight under the slogans:

- Jewish workers break out of the company union, the Histadrut, instrument of class collaboration and Zionist chauvinism!
- For an anti-racist union movement open to all Arab and Jewish workers!
- For militant class struggle and workers' democracy!
- For a workers' party to fight for a workers' state!

A revolutionary workers' party faces a whole series of democratic demands mainly affecting the Arab workers and peasants but the Jewish workers should remember Marx's dictum: "A people that oppresses another cannot itself be free". Any serious crisis for the Zionist state will see the restriction and destruction of bourgeois democracy for Jewish workers, intellectuals and progressives too. The most important and general demand is to end the forty year separation of 2-3 million Palestinians from their own country:

- For the right to return of all Palestinians!
- Down with the internal borders and all restrictions on movement between "Israel", the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem!
- For free elections for all municipal authorities and the legalisation of all political parties including the PLO and its constituent organisations!
- Absolute equality of the Hebrew and Arab languages in state, business, education etc!
- Repeal all repressive and emergency regulations and release all political prisoners!
- For the dissolution of the Israeli defence forces and police and the replacement of them with an integrated popular militia!
 - For the summoning of a sovereign constituent assembly based on universal suffrage of all Palestinian-Israeli citizens over the age of 16!

These demands should be fought for amongst Jews and Arabs. No consistent or sincere democrat can oppose them. If the mass struggle around democratic slogans leads to the shipwreck of the Zionist state before the workers and peasants are convinced in their majority of the need to establish a workers' state based on soviets then revolutionaries—whilst giving no support to the objective of a bourgeois state (i.e. a secular democratic republic)—should fight for the convening of a sovereign constituent assembly based on an armed popular militia.

Revolutionary communists should fight in the elections to such an assembly and in it if it were convened, for a programme that can resolve the national antagonisms; granting the fullest democratic freedoms to both nationalities now resident within Palestine and posing the only social and economic and political basis for doing this—a workers' state and a planned economy. Such a programme must be a programme of transition based upon:

- The nationalisation of all land and its working on a collective or co-operative basis with the restoration of the returning Palestinians full right to participate equally in the farming sector. To make this possible a massive development of the neglected areas of Arab land ownership would be necessary to raise its productivity. Private property in the land is an anachronism and can only be a continued instrument of national antagonism. Of course, collective ownership cannot be imposed on small

peasant farmers. They must be won to it via a process of co-operative working when they see its economic superiority.

- The nationalisation under workers' management of all large scale industry and its co-ordination under a democratically decided upon central plan!
- The nationalisation of the banks, financial institutions and large scale commercial institutions!

A workers' state would grant absolutely equality to all peoples and languages in political and cultural life making state facilities available to fully develop and protect cultural expression in both the Hebrew and Arab languages with full rights for minority languages (Yiddish etc).

This equality and absence of all coercion would extend to the Israeli/Hebrew speaking people themselves once the national oppression of the Palestinian Arabs had been ended and the Zionist state destroyed. Revolutionaries would of course not advocate separation. Quite the contrary. But it would be far better for the Palestinian Arabs to freely facilitate a democratic and equal separation where the Israelis wished it than to exert the slightest coercion themselves. Of course, there could be no question of yielding to an undemocratic minority of hardened Zionists in collusion with imperialism who were acting as a *vendée* against the Palestinian workers' revolution.

The programme for permanent revolution in Palestine, for an uninterrupted strategic advance from democratic and transitional demands in today's conditions to a workers' state, should not be seen as a schema of peaceful or gradual advance. On the contrary the Zionist bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers will not yield to persuasion—to the weapons of criticism. War, revolution and counter-revolution gave birth to the Zionist state and will undoubtedly bring about its destruction.

A living flexible but principled programme will have to be applied and re-applied in action programmes suited to every fundamental change of conditions or decisive shift in the balance of forces or the arena of struggle.

Firstly the Palestinian revolution is intimately and indeed inextricably linked up to the political fate of the immediately surrounding lands; Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Palestinian revolutionaries should seek the closest links with revolutionaries in these countries. The existence of huge Palestinian refugee communities in these countries makes this involvement easier and imperialism and Zionism's repeated interventions makes Palestine almost a domestic issue in all these states. The fate of their class struggle

could be of the greatest importance to the struggle within the Zionist state. The overthrow of a Mubarak or a Hussein could alter the whole balance of forces. A new Arab/Israeli war could also create conditions where the external and internal destruction of the Zionist state could coincide.

There is a political slogan which expresses the goal of a Middle East united against imperialism and led by the working class and poor peasants: *the socialist united states of the Middle East*. It is profoundly more progressive than other goals aimed at unifying against imperialism. That the idea of a united Islam is a reactionary utopia we have already stated. Reactionary because it would not be a democratic but a theocratic state, imposing religious law on non-believers. It would be utopian in that it could hardly unify Sunni and Shi'ite Islam let alone the many sects and minority religions. Pan-Arab nationalism whilst largely a secular ideology also has reactionary and utopian features relative to national minorities—Berbers, Israeli Jews, Kurds within Arab countries—and it cannot unite with overwhelmingly non-Arab states such as Iran. A socialist united states of the Middle East would allow for separate states or autonomous regions for every nationality, would allow for the real national consciousness that distinguishes Palestinians, Syrians, Egyptians, Iraqis to be both expressed and resolved in a state form capable of completing the struggle against imperialism. Thus and only thus could the Balkanisation of the Middle East be ended and the world proletarian revolution carried a mighty step forward.

- Down with the imperialist powers—exploiters and oppressors of the peoples of the Middle East!
- Smash the Zionist state—instrument of imperialism!
- Victory to the national liberation of the Palestinian people!
- Critical support to even bourgeois Arab states in economic or military conflict with imperialism and Israel!
- Unconditional but critical support to the PLO's military struggle by the proletariats of the imperialist countries!
- For permanent revolution in Palestine and the Middle East!
- From the national democratic struggle to the proletarian revolution!
- No to any form of confessional state! For a workers' state in Palestine!
- For revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) parties in every country as a part of a refounded international!

For a socialist united states of the Middle East!



Workers Power is the British section of the League for a Revolutionary Communist International. The LRCI also includes:

ArbeiterInnenstandpunkt (Austria)
 Gruppe Arbeitermacht (Germany)
 Irish Workers Group
 Poder Obrero (peru)
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