

The struggle for Palestine

Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group

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The dust has settled on the latest Israeli attack on Gaza, but the fundamental position remains. Israel continues its slow process of ethnic cleansing in Jerusalem and on the West Bank, while failing to demolish the military capacity of Hamas in Gaza. And yet, the situation is not stable.

Protests in Jerusalem and on the West Bank exploded on 6 May, when Israeli authorities moved to enforce evictions of Palestinians from the Sheik Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. Israeli law allows Jews who fled during the war over the establishment of Israel to reclaim their property, but prevents Palestinians from doing the same. The double standard in Israeli law is deliberate. It's what being a "Jewish State" is all about.

The #SaveSheikJarrah protests started in Jerusalem, but then swept the West Bank and into the territory of 1948 Israel. They grew in intensity and police and military violence against them increased. Fascist mobs chanting "Death to Arabs" rampaged through Palestinian areas of Israel's cities. They were often protected by the police while they did their violent work.

As Palestinian resistance deepened, it became more organised, but stayed out of the control of both Fatah and Hamas, the two main capitalist parties of the occupied Palestinian territories. A strike wave developed. Israel was under massive pressure and its propaganda machine had no targets.

Hamas to the rescue

It was Hamas that came to Israel's rescue. The developing mass Palestinian insurrection was threatening to render them irrelevant. Hamas sought to counter that by launching a rocket attack on Israel, starting on 10 May. This was an engraved invitation for Israel to send its air force on murderous bombing raids against Gaza. Transferring the struggle onto the military plane was part of the plan. (Readers should note we do not equate the terrorism of Hamas with Israeli State terror. Israel's violence is systematic, institutionalised and on a far greater scale.)

Hamas and Israel succeeded in their objective. They undercut mass political action by the Palestinians and converted them into passive spectators of a military conflict from which they were excluded. Israel was once again flattening Gaza with its air force while Hamas fired rockets, whose inaccuracy rendered them almost random, into civilian targets and perhaps the occasional military one. By the time of the 21 May ceasefire, the steam was gone from the mass struggle. It subsided soon afterwards. The status quo had been re-established, for the time being.

Zionism

The oppression of the Palestinians is a product of the Zionist colonisation project that created Israel and continues to build settlements on the West Bank and force Palestinians out of East Jerusalem. Until World War II, it was a minority political philosophy amongst Jews and, of these, only a minority favoured the establishment of a Jewish State. The majority position of Zionists then was a binational State for both Jews and Arabs in Palestine.

After World War II, Zionism gained the support of a majority of Jews. The Nazi Holocaust had not only killed six million European Jews, but, for many survivors, destroyed faith that anti-Semitism could be eradicated.

Israel was created in 1948 and 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homes in the atrocity that became known as Nakba. As a Jewish State, Israel is not the State of all its citizens. Rather,

it is the moral and political equivalent of a White Australia or an Islamic Republic. Despite a veneer of equality, its Palestinian citizens are systematically discriminated against by a web of laws. Palestinians in the occupied territories are treated as unwelcome obstacles who are expelled when circumstances allow and their land is assimilated into Israel.

The Palestinian struggle

In the early days, the struggle of the Palestinians against Zionist colonisation was conducted under largely traditional leadership. The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, leader of the Palestinians in the 1930s, was a bloodthirsty bigot who spent the majority of WWII collaborating with the Nazis in Germany. The Palestine Liberation Organisation, founded in 1964, initially adopted armed struggle, but shifted after a couple of years to a strategy of building support among capitalist States.

The First Intifada ran from 1987 to 1993 and marked the entry of the Palestinian masses into the field of struggle for the first time since the 1930s. It consisted of strikes and demonstrations which, until close to the end, adopted a deliberate strategy of avoiding lethal violence, despite the intense violence of Israel in trying to suppress it. The Intifada was marked by general support for the PLO political position, but a determination to maintain its organisational autonomy. It culminated in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and 1995.

Hamas was formed at the start of the Intifada, growing out of the Gaza branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. It gained popularity as Palestinians became disillusioned with the results of the Oslo Accords. It was the primary force behind the Second Intifada of 2000–05. Its signature tactic at the time was suicide bombing of Israeli civilians. This destroyed the peace camp in Israeli politics and led to a massive shift to the right in Israel. It was militarily ineffective and a political disaster.

Since then, there has been a strategic stalemate, with inconclusive Israeli attacks on Gaza in 2008 and 2014. Palestinians started to become disillusioned with Hamas while continuing to deepen their distrust of Fatah, who have degenerated into corrupt collaborators with Israel. This year's conflict has restored the reputation of Hamas to some extent, but has not changed the underlying situation.

Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement was launched in 2005 when the Second Intifada petered out without result. It was consciously set up by a wide range of civil society organisations as an alternative to armed struggle and outside of the control of both Hamas and Fatah. Its aim is the achievement of a democratic, secular State in Palestine, where Jews and Palestinians will live as equals. Taking its inspiration from South Africa, it proposes civil boycotts of Israel, disinvestment from Israeli companies and from companies doing business with Israel and the imposition of sanctions on Israel by other States.

This movement has been growing in strength ever since. Accordingly, the BDS movement has become the target of most of Israel's propaganda abroad. Its key argument is that the return of the Palestinian refugees would lead to Jews being outvoted and Israel's nature as a Jewish State being dismantled. According to Israel, this would be anti-Semitic, but the Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group disagrees. The return of refugees is a universal right and majorities achieved

by ethnic cleansing are indefensible. People everywhere should live in freedom and equality, so the discriminatory basis of the Israeli State is also illegitimate.

We defend the BDS movement against Israel's propaganda, while also criticising them. We do not oppose the boycott aspect of the movement, but BDS relies for its main strength on the prospect of getting capitalist governments and corporations to put pressure on Israel. This hands control to the capitalists over what sort of society will exist in Palestine. The outcomes would not be favourable to the Palestinians.

The road forward

For the Palestinians to achieve freedom, many things need to change. Firstly, a political movement needs to develop that can prevent Hamas derailing mass struggle as happened in May this year. Attacks on civilians, whether through rockets or suicide bombs, unite Israel, driving the working class into the arms of their exploiters.

Second, the labour wing of the BDS movement has to develop strongly, with a special focus on preventing the export of weapons and military equipment to Israel or their import from Israel. Port workers in Livorno in Italy refused to load a ship they believed was going to carry weapons to Israel. This was an excellent action and should serve as a model for workers worldwide.

Thirdly, and most importantly, workers need to rise and overthrow the sheikhs, the Ayatollahs and all the other tyrants that plague West Asia and North Africa. Egypt is the most important country in this process. Over twice as populous as any other Arab country, it shares a border with Israel and currently assists with enforcing the starvation blockade of Gaza. Egypt has a large working class which has engaged in repeated militant strike movements, most recently in 2011 during the Arab Spring. The workers' movement must purge anti-Semitism from Egypt and other countries in the region. Anti-Semitism serves as a lightning rod for the tyrants. Not only is it ethically wrong, but it captures and safely dissipates class anger that should be directed at the tyrants themselves.

A workers' revolution in Egypt would split Israel along class lines. It would place immense pressure on Israel by strategically boycotting trade with it and by relieving the blockade of Gaza. It would also create an example of a better society which would appeal to the class interests of workers in Israel – including Jewish workers currently committed to Zionism. And, without national unity, the Zionist project will unravel.

The Melbourne Anarchist Communist Group's solution to the oppression of the Palestinians is the same as for oppression everywhere. The problems of capitalism can only be solved by workers' revolution. In Palestine, that means defeating Zionism and replacing it with the No State Solution, a society of libertarian communism that operates on the basis of consistent federalism.

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