CLASS AGAINST CLASS

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THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

WAR HAS COME ONCE AGAIN TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

On October 6th, 1973, the armed forces of Egypt and Syria crossed the cease-fire line established after the war of June 1967 into Israeli-occupied territory seized from these states in that war.

But the new war differs from that of 1967 in one very important respect - for reasons that will be analysed later, Israel no longer enjoys the full support of world imperialism, even of United States imperialism. Already in the first few days of the war the powerful Israeli war machine has suffered great losses in men and machines, already the first arrogant communiques of the Israeli High Command have given way to gloomy admissions that the war is likely to be long and bitter, already the myth of the "invincibility" of the Israeli armed forces has melted away.

The Foundation of Israel

Zionism, the political philosophy of the Israeli ruling class, has been since its inception at the end of the 19th. century an ideology serving objectively the interests of developed capitalism, of imperialism. It presents workers and petty bourgeois of Jewish descent as members of "a Jewish nation", as "aliens" in the countries in which they live; it tells them that, to be "free", they must emigrate to their ancient "national homeland" in Palestine. Thus, the participation of a Zionist worker in the struggles of the working class for a better life, for socialism, can at best be only half-hearted, for he regards himself as an "outsider" whose eyes are directed towards "his own" country, which has now taken concrete shape in the state of Israel. Thus, Zionism is complementary to anti-semitism in its reactionary divisive effect.

The desire of the British imperialists to win the support of the Zionist movement for the Allied war effort in the First World War brought the Balfour Declaration of November 1917; this promised that the British Government would facilitate the setting up of "a National Home for the Jewish People" in Palestine. The British

imperialists were unworried by the fact that two years earlier, in July 1915, they had won Husein ibn Ali, the Grand Sherif of Mecca, to the side of the Allies by promising to support the establishment of "an independent Arab state" in Palestine and that in 1916 they had signed a secret treaty with the French imperialists dividing Palestine between them. Palestine became simply "the much promised land"!

When the First World War was over, the British and French imperialists took over the Arab Near East, disguising their colonial rule under the cloak of "League of Nations mandates". As Jewish immigration continued, both legally and illegally, into Palestine, the rise of Arab national liberation movements led the imperialists to adopt neo-colonial manoeuvres: Iraq was granted "independence" in 1932, Syria and Lebanon in 1941, Jordan in 1946. And in 1947 the British government announced that it was ending its rule over Palestine in May of the following year and was transferring its "responsibilities" there to the United Nations.

The United Nations envisaged the partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, with Jerusalem as an independent city. But this scheme was never put into effect. On May 14th, 1948, the Zionists proclaimed most of Palestine "the state of Israel".

The Palestinian Refugees

At the time of its formation, the state of Israel contained 1.3 million Arabs and 0.7 million Jews. The Zionists took steps to establish a Jewish majority. As Michael Bar-Zhchar says in his sympathetic biography of the founder of Israel :

> "Ben Gurion never believed in the possibility of coexistence with the Arabs. The fewer Arabs within the frontiers of the future state the better ... A major offensive against the Arabs would ... reduce to a minimum the proportion of the Arab population within the state.... He may be accused of racism, but in that case the whole Zionist movement would have to be put on trial".

Thus, even before the declaration of "independence" Zionist armed gangs had begun a campaign of massacre and terror against the Arab population, driving great numbers of them to seek refuge in the neighbouring Arab states. By 1950 a million Arab refugees from Palestine were officially receiving United Nations aid, and by 1971 2.6 million of the 3.0 million population of Israel were Jews.

Dependence upon Imperialism

The establishment of a Jewist racist state in the heart of, and hostile to, the Arab world gave world imperialism a valuable bridgehead against the Arab national liberation movement - a bridgehead dependent upon the active support of world imperialism for its very existence.

At first Israel continued to depend upon British imperialism. It was Britain, together with France, which collaborated with Israel in the war of aggression against Egypt which began in October 1956. But the more powerful US imperialists were unwilling to allow their British and French rivals to extend their influence in the Middle East, and compelled the British, French and Israeli forces to withdraw ignominiously from Egyptian territory.

From this time on, the Israeli ruling class transferred their dependence to US imperialism, which supplied huge quantitities of military "aid" to Israel. It was as a result of this military "aid" that in June 1967 Israel was able to launch its war of aggression against Egypt, Syria and Jordan, compelling these states to accept a cease-fire which left Israel in control of large areas of their territory.

Later, in the UN General Assembly, the United States representative defended the Israeli aggression as an action of "self-defence", but in November 1967 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution, drafted by Britain, which demanded that Israel withdraw all troops to her former boundaries and bring about a just settle-

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nent of the refugee problem. The Council appointed Gunnar Jarring, of Sweden, as UN Special Representative charged with securing the fulfilment of the resolution, but the Israeli government has always refused to carry out its terms.

The Palestine National Liberation Movement

The 1967 defeat of the Arab states, and the new numbers of Arab refugees which the war added to those of earlier years, stimulated the rise of a Palestine national liberation movement, formed largely from among these refugees. Although this resistance movement soon fragmented into a considerable number of rival organisations and their declared aim of the liberation of Palestine was greatly retarded when the leaders of some of these organisations turned from organised guerilla warfare to acts of individual terrorism in various countries, it remained a significant force.

Washington's New Plan

By the summer of 1970 it had become clear to the most influential section of the United States imperialists that it would be essential for the USA to import large quantities of oil in the next few years from the Arab states in the Middle East. This meant that full support of Israel against these Arab states was no longer in the best interests of the US imperialists.

From this time on the US imperialists made their position clear to the Arab Middle East governments. They would endeavour to persuade the Israeli government to withdraw "voluntarily" to the boundaries existing before the war of 1967. And if those attempts failed, they would hold back (without discontinuing entirely) their military "aid" to Israel and would tacitly approve of an all-out war on the part of the Arab states against Israel provided :

1) the Palestine national liberation movements were effectively liquidated; and

2) the representatives of Soviet imperialism were expelled from the Arab states.

Whatever the military outcome of such a war might be, it would gravely weaken the military and economic power of Israel and facilitate the imposition upon its government of a new cease-fire compelling it to accept the terms of the Security Council resolution of November 1967. The European imperialist powers - even more dependent upon Middle East oil than the USA - could be depended on to take the initiative in this imposition.

The Execution of the Plan

In 1970 and 1971 the US government pressed its "peace plan" through visits to the Middle East by Secretary of State William Rogers, Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, and diplomats Donald Bergus and Michael Sterner. The Israeli government, over-confident of its position, refused to consider withdrawal to its old frontiers.

Meanwhile, using as a pretext the hi-jacking of several airliners to Jordan by Palestine commandos, in September 1970 King Hussein of Jordan launched a large-scale offensive against the national liberation forces within Jordan; this offensive was resumed in July 1971, after which Hussein announced that the resistance forces within Jordan had been completely liquidated.

In April 1973 the government of Lebanon, using as pretext the Israeli commando raid against Palestinian guerillas near Beirut in February, launched an offensive against the Palestinian national liberation forces within Lebanon. The attack ended in May after the guerillas had suffered heavy casualties.

Meanwhile, the Egyptian government took action against the representatives of Soviet neo-imperialism, as described at the time in the MLOB's journal RED FRONT:

> "Since the death of Nasser, two conficting trends have emerged within the Egyptian capitalist class - each standing for a different method of trying to solve the problem of the continuing occupation of Egyptian territory by the troops of their U.S.-dominated neighbour, Israel.

One section, headed by former Vice-President Ali Sabry, favoured the adoption of a phoney programme of "socialism" as a pretext for completely subordinating Egypt to Soviet neo-imperialism in an alliance which would force Israel to retreat from her present positions.

The other section, headed by President Anwar Sadat himself, favoured confederating Egypt with Syria and Lybia, in order to offer to subordinate this confederation to US imperialism in return for US pressure on her Israeli puppets to withdraw their forces.

The US imperialists having indicated their interest in this second line of approach the President dismissed Ali Sabry on the eve of the visit to Egypt by US Secretary of State William Rogers, at the beginning of May 1971.

Soon afterwards several hundred prominent persons associated with the pro-Soviet faction within the capitalist class - including Ali Sabry; the Secretary-General of the ruling "Arab Socialist Union", Abdul Nur; six Cabinet Ministers, including the Minister of Defence, General Mohamed Fawzy, and the Minister of the Interior, Sharawy Gomaa - were arrested in the name of "preserving the independence of Egypt from a coup engineered by a foreign power".

Apprehensive for the safety of their massive economic and military investments (more than half of Soviet foreign "aid" has gone to Egypt), the Soviet neo-imperialists immediately despatched a high-level though "unofficial delegation" to Cairo headed by President Podgorny. The Egyptian government was pleased to sign a 15-year "Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation" with the Soviet Union, and to use it as blackmail to further persuade the US imperialists to pressure their Israeli puppets into a peace settlement acceptable to the Egyptian capitalist class." (RED FRONT, July-August 1971; p.20).

In September 1973 the Syrian government imposed "strict restrictions" on the movements of Soviet personnel in the country.

Meanwhile, in August, US Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco had made the position of the US imperialists only too clear when he said bluntly on Israeli TV:

> "While our interests in many respects are parallel to the interests of Israel, they are not synonymous with those of the state of Israel. The interests of the United States go beyond any one nation in this area. .. There is increasing concern in our country over the energy question and I think that it is foolhardy to think that this is not a factor in the situation."

In September King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, whose country is a long-standing semi-colony of the USA to which it exports almost all its oil, declared (in support of the US plan) that continuing US support for Israel might be purchased "at the cost of Saudi oil". President Nixon commented on this statement in a manner strikingly different from his earlier statements of full support for Israel, saying:

"Both sides are at fault. Both sides need to start negotiating. That is our position".

The Israeli leaders, becoming aware that they might be as expendable to the changing needs of US imperialism as the Chiang Kai-shek regime, made frantic approaches to the British and German imperialists. But Chancellor Willy Brandt, invited to Israel for a state visit in June 1973, said only what British Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Hume had declared more bluntly in Cairo in September 1971, that Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories was "a vital requirement".

When at the beginning of October 1973, the Austrian government closed down the transit camp for Jews from the Soviet Union (a capitalist government does not change its policy to save the lives of a few Jewish hostages), the relative isolation of the Israeli rulers from imperialism was finally clear.

A Just War of Liberation

The war of the Arab states for the liberation of the territories seized from them by Israel on behalf of United States imperialism is a just war, which will have the support of progressive people in every country. This just character is not altered by the fact that the US imperialists have, in a new world situation, given the green light to the Arab states.

But a war fought by Arab states with the tacit support of the US imperialists cannot solve the plight of the Palestine refugees. This requires the forcible destruction of the present Israeli racist state machine and the establishment of a democratic Palestinian state in which Arabs and Jews can have equal civil rights. This can be brought about, not by the present war, but only by the armed struggle of a united Palestinian national liberation movement purged of illusions of the usefulness of acts of individual terrorism. BUT THIS IS A QUESTION FOR THE FUTURE.