

NEAR EAST CEASEFIRE:

More War Ahead!

The continuing war between Israel and the surrounding Arab states has been temporarily halted by a ceasefire imposed by the U.S. and USSR. Even more so than in the previous wars, this ceasefire guarantees the continuation of bloodletting in the Near East. Because of Israeli intransigence, particularly its desire to force the surrender of the Egyptian III Army after the ceasefire, war could break out again any day.

Both sides were reluctant to accept the first ceasefire of October 22, Israel only tentatively more so than Egypt and Syria. The Meir government tried hard to get a three-day postponement in order to expand its conquests on the west bank of the Suez Canal. When the U.S. refused to accede to this, the Israeli command simply ignored the UN ceasefire and continued fighting, in what has become something of a Zionist military tradition, harking back to the innumerable ceasefires of the 1948-49 war.

With the Israeli military advances of October 22-24, the attitude of the Egyptian government toward continuing the war changed; it launched a diplomatic offensive to pressure the great powers into enforcing the ceasefire on the original October 22 lines. Sadat's appeal for direct U.S. military inter-

vention to police Israel should disabuse everyone (even the vicarious Arab nationalists so abundant on the U.S. left) of the notion that the Arab states were struggling against American imperialism. In fact, a major aim of the Arab states in going to war was to create a situation in which the U.S. would be pressured by the Soviet Union and West European powers into curbing Israeli expansionism.

U.S./USSR Détente Buried in the Sands of Sinai

With Sadat's appeal for direct great-power intervention, Brezhnev saw an opportunity to maneuver the U.S. into a joint action against Israel and apparently applied some pressure to that effect. Nixon reacted by dramatically reminding Brezhnev that Israel was after all an ally of the U.S. against the Soviet Union, not vice versa: on October 24 he ordered a full military alert. Contrary to Kissinger's pious protests, the alert was in good part for domestic consumption, a reassertion of Nixon's posture as the tough Commander-in-Chief. The most that the U.S. government could subsequently claim in justification of its world-wide "Condition 3" military alert was the "ambiguity" of *continued on page 10*

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Brezhnev's messages—so ambiguous, in fact, that not even the Administration's usual apologists could come up with "leaked" accounts of the nature of the supposed Russian threats.

Nor was the direct "hot line" connection between the White House and the Kremlin used in the alleged "worst crisis since the 1962 Cuban missile showdown." That the Soviet government had no intention of unilateral military intervention in the Near East was clearly demonstrated when, on the same day as the U.S. alert, it voted for the UN resolution barring inclusion of contingents from the major powers in the forces policing the ceasefire. Even hard line cold warriors are now openly nervous about Nixon's finger on the button which could set off nuclear world war.

Immediately after Brezhnev's visit to the U.S. last June, when U.S.-Soviet relations could not have appeared rosier, a *Workers Vanguard* (6 July) headline proclaimed "U.S./USSR Détente Doomed." A scant four months later, the American government orders a world-wide military alert to "forestall Russian aggression." But even before the latest Arab-Israel war the détente had been heavily eroded, in part because a section of the American ruling class was trying to strengthen Israel by encouraging massive emigration of Russian Jews, in part due to evidence of significant advances in Russian military technology (the Soviet MIRV tests). With the Arab-Israel war, the Meany-Lovestone leadership of the AFL/CIO did its bit to revive the Cold War by threatening a maritime boycott of Russian trade, attempting to blackmail the Soviet government into ceasing arms shipments to the Arabs. (In the entire trade-union movement, only the Militant-Solidarity Caucus of the National Maritime Union sought to organize workers to oppose the anti-Soviet boycott [see *WV* No. 31, 26 October].) And recently the Nixon administration has gone back on its pledge to support lower tariffs on imports from the USSR, making tariff cuts conditional on Brezhnev's "behaving himself" in the Near East.

While conditioned by the particular irrationality and vulnerability of the Nixon administration (which are by no means unrelated to capitalist society), the events of October 24 reveal the thin edge preventing the American bourgeoisie from plunging humanity into a nuclear inferno. The Kremlin bureaucracy, however, has repeatedly shown its inability to understand this and the basic class contradictions in the world today. Its vain hopes to continue the wartime alliance of the U.S., USSR, Britain, France and China led to the American Communist Party's call for a permanent no-strike pledge after World War II; the French and Italian CPs' participation in bourgeois popular-front governments, their disarming of the anti-Nazi partisans and initial failure to oppose the Marshall Plan; Stalin's agreement at Yalta to cede Greece to the British; and his opposition to the drive to power by Tito's Yugoslav partisans and the Chinese guerrillas led by Mao. In the Near East the Russian leaders have for years acquiesced in the suppression of the local Communist parties by their Egyptian, Iraqi and Syrian allies, with the excuse of a supposed anti-imperialist alliance with the nationalist bourgeoisies of the backward capitalist countries. More recently, Brezhnev's illusions in détente have led the Russian government to openly support Nixon even while the American CP was calling for his impeachment.

The parasitic bureaucrats in the Kremlin are constantly looking for alliances with the "peace-loving" bour-

geoisie, even at the risk of threatening the basic achievements of the October Revolution. This is a logical consequence of their role as the transmitters of the pressure of imperialism and of their Stalinist ideology of class collaboration. The Chinese Stalinists are, of course, no better, although they have conflicting national interests. Thus Chou En-lai sees only "great-power ambitions" dividing the USSR and the U.S. and goes so far in a bid for a U.S.-Chinese alliance as to openly endorse NATO as a weapon against "Soviet social imperialism" (*New York Times*, 30 October). Thus both Russian and Chinese bureaucracies have backed Nixon just as Moscow backed Johnson before him, as a supposed force for peace. The October 24 U.S. world-wide military alert unmasks the Moscow-Peking dreams of peaceful coexistence as the dangerous—and deadly—illusions they are.

The fundamental hostility of U.S. imperialism to the Russian degenerated workers state tends to drive them into military conflict, even in situations where the leaders of the two nations want to avoid such confrontations. For that reason, it is necessary for revolutionary socialists faced with the local wars, such as the present Arab-Israeli conflict, to warn the working masses of the danger of World War III and the need to defend the Soviet Union. At the same time, the Brezhnev regime's unashamed support for bourgeois and feudal Arab nationalism and its lack of any sense of proletarian internationalism are major obstacles to mobilizing the American working class in defense of the Soviet Union should there be a direct clash with the U.S. in the Near East.

NATO—or the U.S.-Portuguese Alliance

Not the least important result of the fourth Arab-Israel war is that it demonstrated and reinforced the weakening of American world power through *imperialist* rivalry. U.S. imperialism expected and is temporarily reconciled to the pro-Arab neutrality of France and Britain; it was unsettled by the rigid neutrality of its most important and loyal ally, West Germany; and it was humiliated by the presumptuous neutrality of the two-bit generalissimos running Spain, Greece and Turkey. Twenty-five years after the founding of NATO, the U.S.' only dependable European ally in this conflict of world importance is that great sixteenth-century imperial power, Portugal.

The objectively pro-Arab neutrality of the European bourgeoisies reflects both oil diplomacy and more fundamental imperialist conflict. In the long run, the attempts of the militarily, socially and politically weak—but oil-rich—sheikhdoms at economic blackmail of the capitalist powers will be met with force, probably in the form of the Iranian army. However, given the present balance of forces, the European powers are prepared to conciliate Arab nationalism. From the bourgeois standpoint there is no reason why West Europe should freeze this winter because Dayan wants to control ten more miles of Sinai desert.

The pro-Arab policies of Britain and France reflect far more than a means of securing fuel supplies for the next few months. The Near East has been the only major colonial area where these old imperialist powers seriously competed with the U.S. in the post-war period. After the fiasco of their 1956 Suez invasion, France and Britain sought to take advantage of the political vacuum produced by the U.S.' pro-Israel policy on the one hand and the reluctance of the Arab bourgeois nationalists (not to mention the feudal reactionaries like Faisal) to excessive dependence on the Soviet Union. In presenting the Arab regimes with a third option between accepting the Zionist state and a full-blown alliance with the Soviets, Britain and France have sought a sphere of influence in the Near East by essentially diplomatic methods. However, the combination of a lengthy Arab-Israeli war

and a weakened U.S. imperialism could well transform the British and French diplomatic intervention into direct military involvement.

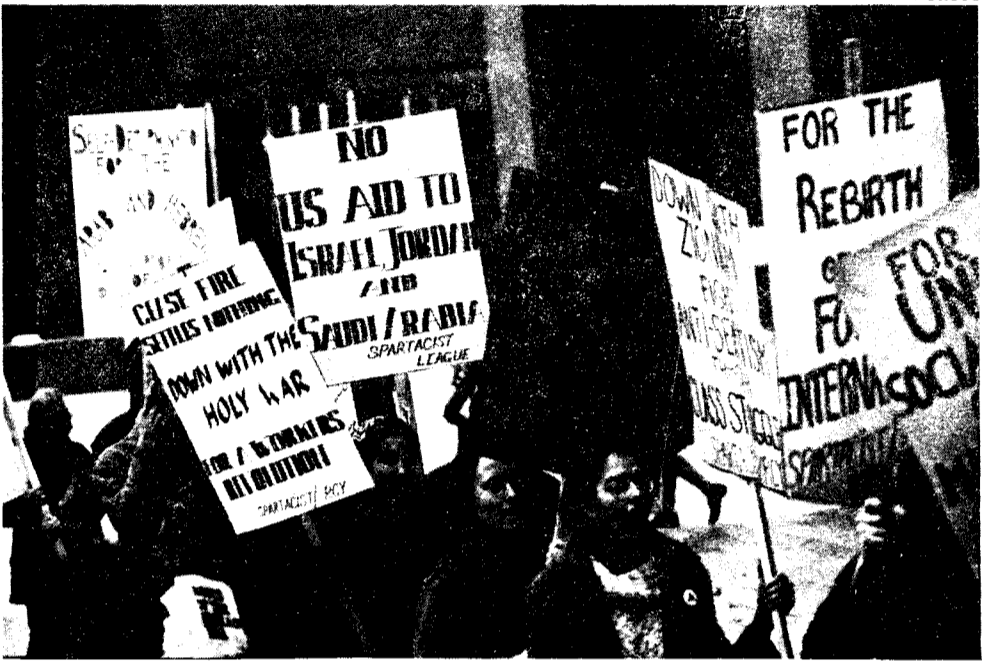
The U.S. Protects and Polices Israel

Sadat's appeal for U.S. forces to police Israel should have convinced even political idiots (even the Socialist Labour League's Gerry Healy and the Workers League's Tim Wohlforth, the only people in the world who believe the Arabs were victorious in this war) that Israel is something other than an American base in the Near East. That Israel is today entirely dependent on the U.S. for heavy military hardware is not open to question. As Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said in the Knesset last week, "anyone advocating we run the war in a state of rupture with the United States is advocating we can't possibly win... I'm not sure the soldiers know it but the shells they are firing today were not in their possession a week ago" (*New York Times*, 31 October). But while Israel is now act-

torted by the significant Jewish population in the U.S., which possesses a certain weight in the bourgeoisie proper and a disproportionate influence in the cultural establishment. The widespread pro-Zionist sentiment of American and European Jews in part reflects an insecurity stemming from their emplacement in a historically hostile gentile society, an insecurity greatly strengthened by the Nazi experience. Thus the Zionism of non-Israeli, overwhelming petty-bourgeois Jews is in part the chauvinism of the oppressed, albeit of a vicarious and projective sort.

The vocal and visibility of the American Zionist lobby should not blind one to the fact that the American ruling class is not composed of Jewish nationalists. In fact, the hysterical desperation of American Zionists arises from an awareness that the pro-Israel policies of the U.S. government are contingent, not fundamental. Even more so than their American supporters, Meir and Dayan understand the limited and brittle nature of U.S. imperialism's commitment to Israeli na-

WV PHOTO



SL/RCY demonstrate in Boston against U.S. aid to Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

ing as a client state of the U.S., in reality, the alliance between the American ruling class and Zionism is complex and breakable.

The U.S. first supported Israel in the late 1940's as a counter to the British client states of Abdullah's Transjordan and Farouk's Egypt. With the rise of Ba'athism and Nasserism in the 1950's the U.S. looked to Israel as a military ally against a possible alliance between Arab nationalism and the Soviet Union. In the most general sense U.S. support for Zionism is part of the standard imperialist policy of Balkanizing ex-colonial areas, inflaming local nationalisms in order to divert mass struggles away from proletarian socialism.

However, with the passage of time Israel has become a handicap to the objective interests of U.S. imperialism. While the Zionist-Arab conflict has certainly arrested revolutionary class struggle in that area, the state of Israel has also served as a pole for Arab unity and Soviet diplomatic gains. Israel's value as the gendarme of the Near East is effectively offset by the profound hatred it inspires among the Arab masses. The U.S. is clearly grooming Shah Reza Pahlavi's Iran as the cop of the oil fields. And as Kissinger rightly said, the U.S. ruling class really has no desire to pull the nuclear trigger simply because Dayan and his generals want five more miles on the Golan Heights. For these reasons, in 1967 and even more so in the present war, the U.S. has acted as Israel's military ally while simultaneously curbing the dangerously inflated ambitions of the Zionist regime. This was the essence of the 1970 U.S.-proposed and Soviet-backed Rogers Plan, calling on Israel to return to the pre-1967 borders. The Arab regimes are well aware of this dual role of the U.S. in regard to Israel, hence their calls for U.S. intervention in the current battle.

The strategic interest of U.S. imperialism in the state of Israel is at once powerfully reinforced and dis-

tionism. Thus when some American Zionists wished to attack Nixon for his insufficiently pro-Israel stance, the Meir government instructed them not to risk antagonizing the president:

"Until now, according to the sources, the Israeli Embassy has made a special effort to deter Americans from lobbying the Nixon administration. The fear is that public pressure would displease the President and Mr. Kissinger... American businessmen called Israeli officials in Jerusalem to ask whether they should place calls to senatorial friends. According to the two [sources] they were told to be quiet and raise money."

—*New York Times*, 1 November

Dayan is certainly aware of the fact that one of Israel's few "Third-World" supporters, Chiang Kai-shek, could deliver a fine lecture on the fate of U.S. client states, like Taiwan, which become a serious hindrance to the strategic interests of American imperialism!

Return to the 1949 Truce Lines

As communists, in both the 1967 and present wars we called for a policy of revolutionary defeatism on both sides—the Hebrew and Arab peoples have nothing to gain from these wars! We demand that the Israelis give up the fruits of their armed conquests and return to the 1949 truce lines. But the demand that the Israelis unilaterally yield the territory conquered in the 1967 war in no way justifies the Arab side in the present war.

Unlike 1967, when the Arab regimes openly boasted about destroying the Zionist state, in the present war they proclaimed the more modest war aims of only recapturing their "lost" territories. However, in most wars between bourgeois states one side claims it is seeking "only" to reverse the defeat it suffered in the previous war. For revolutionary socialists, the claims of Egypt and Syria that they are fighting to recover conquered territory no more

sanctify their war effort than the French claim to have been fighting for Alsace-Lorraine in World War I or Hitler's claim in World War II that he "only" wanted to undo the Versailles Treaty.

The Arab states' demand that Israel return *their* territory rings particularly hollow since the population occupying that territory (in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) is composed overwhelmingly of Palestinians, who have suffered national oppression for years at the hands of these same Arab regimes. Thus in the 1948 war and again in 1967 their war aims were not to liberate but to carve up among themselves the former Palestine. A precondition for the present war was the physical destruction by these regimes of the Palestinian resistance movement in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Not a few of the Palestinian commandos fighting in this war were released from Arab jails.

Currently the Egyptians and Syrians do not even make a pretense of fighting for the Palestinians' right of national self-determination and instead simply call for the return to the 1967 boundaries. (In other words the Gaza refugee camps would be administered by Egypt rather than Israel.) Jordan, on the other hand, shows no eagerness to recapture the West Bank, since Palestinians already constitute a majority of its population and the addition of several hundred thousand more would directly threaten the viability of the Hashemite monarchy. The military defeat of Israel, today as in 1967, would mean for the Palestinian people nothing but the replacement of one national oppressor by another.

And that is the central reason why the Arab side is not supportable. The only genuine national liberation struggle against Israel, one that revolutionary socialists can support, would be an uprising of the Palestinian masses themselves. However, such an uprising could hardly succeed unless linked to an internationalist movement among workers in the neighboring territories. A victory by the existing Arab regimes would mean the forcible subordination of the Hebrew people to the Arab majority—i.e., simply the reverse of the present unjust situation. More than anywhere else in the world today, the struggle between Arab and Hebrew nationalisms demonstrates the impossibility of achieving genuine national emancipation on a truly democratic basis except by united proletarian revolution.

For a Bi-National Palestinian Workers State! For a Socialist Federation of the Near East!

The total domination of Hebrew and Arab nationalisms in the Near East over the past 25 years has effectively suppressed revolutionary proletarian struggle in that area. (Significantly, the only country in the area which experienced revolutionary working-class struggle has been Iraq, which is not involved in direct military confrontation with Israel.) Only a proletarian socialist revolution can produce a genuinely democratic solution to the national conflict in the Near East—a bi-national Palestinian workers state, with full guarantees of the rights of both Hebrew and Arab peoples, as part of a socialist federation of the Near East. While this is at all times our fundamental program, we must also oppose genocide or national oppression on either side. Thus it is obligatory for socialists to uphold the right of both Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrew-speaking population to self-determination—that is, to secede and form their own separate states—no matter how difficult the resulting territorial division.

Only the working class—Arab and Hebrew alike—can overcome the endless cycle of war, oppression and revenge through united class struggle and the creation of the proletarian vanguard, a unified multi-national Trotskyist party whose program would uniquely express the most general and historic interests of the working class. ■

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