

The Rome Conference

The solitude and the massacre of the proletariat in the Middle East

Federazione dei Comunisti Anarchici

28 July 2006

They are called “civilian deaths”, victims of US collateral effects in Iraq, victims of Israeli bombardments in Palestine and Lebanon, defenceless human shields sacrificed by Hezbollah guerrillas in southern Lebanon, sacrificial lambs of al-Qaeda in Iraq, innocent workers picked out by Hamas kamikazes in Israel, victims of the daily Baathist repression in Syria or the daily repression by the imams in Iran.

What they are, in fact, are tens of thousands of men and women killed by the war and by the nationalism of various States, hundreds of thousands of refugees, fleeing their homes to find some sort of precarious safety, depending on humanitarian corridors which are under the control of... the military.

What they are, in fact, are millions of men and women, artfully divided by religious, ethnic and linguistic differences, all exacerbated by the effects of nationalism and militarist racism of States that are intent on carving out a more important role for themselves in the imperialist interests in the area.

They are the ones who were missing from the Rome conference. They are the disinherited with no representation, with no political power other than the heads of State, with no economic power other than the heads of State, the World Bank, the IMF and the huge oil multinationals in the hands of the Arab and Western bourgeoisie. They are workers with no unions, that are banned time and time again, repressed and broken up all over the Middle East, even to the extent of physically eliminating their members, such as Hadi Sahel, killed in Iraq in 2005.

There will be no future for them in the nationalism of their States or aspiring States. They will not be freed by the old methods of third-worldism which still sets one (oppressed) people against another (the oppressor) people, without ever realising that the real clash – in every country, in every people – is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, between the exploited and the exploiter, between the miserable refugees wandering round southern Lebanon and the rich of Beirut taking refuge in the hotels of Damascus, between the Palestinians of Israel and with them the African Jews at the bottom of the Israeli social ladder on the one hand and the bourgeoisie in power in Tel Aviv, on the other.

Jewish Zionism is not the enemy of the Arab proletariat, Sunni or Shiite Islam is not the enemy of the Israeli proletariat. The real enemy is their respective national bourgeoisies and the international bourgeoisie.

The tragedy of Lebanon sums up the enormity of these interests. Israel must hold on to the territories conquered in the 1982 war; Sunni Syria — which never really left its Lebanese “colony” — demands its restitution and arms Shiite Hezbollah in order to keep pressure on Israel; Hezbollah may think it has given the Palestinians a hand by distracting Israeli attention from Gaza, but in fact what is happening in Gaza today seems less important than what is happening in southern Lebanon; Sunni Syria has shifted from the anti-Saddam alliance of 1991 to an alliance with Shiite Iran in order to hang onto the coat-tails of the area’s growing imperialist power against the USA between Iraq and Afghanistan; and underneath all this in a web of corridors and the exploitation of raw materials by States and between States in the whole Western Asian region, all of them are chasing the best interests and the greatest power in the shadow of imperialism. US imperialism, Russian imperialism, Chinese imperialism, maybe even European imperialism.

The new Italian government has been able to set itself up, thanks to an old reputation among the Arab countries, as a credible mediator useful to both the United States and to Syria and Iran. But while it has won itself back a role in foreign affairs that is closer to its national tradition (continuing the foreign policy of Craxi and Andreotti) after the lickspittle policies of the last government, it is still guided by the hegemonic interests of the USA, with little or no room for manoeuvre.

In the meantime people go on dying in Gaza, the West Bank and southern Lebanon. The civilian dead in a sub-imperialist war, not a war of liberation.

The Rome Conference served to add more victims: the ceasefire has nothing to do with common human mercy for the sake of defenceless lives — we have to wait for the competing bourgeoisies to argue it out. The Lebanese workers will have to wait, take cover and hope for the best. As will Palestinian and Israeli workers. But the Middle East’s proletariat can wait for international conferences no longer! There has to be a new hope for salvation, for autonomy, for class unity, and this can be achieved through the anti-militarist opposition of the Israeli refusniks and deserters, through the development of the non-violent struggle against the Wall that Israeli militants and Palestinians have started together, through the re-birth of trade unions in Iraq and Syria, through the struggles of oil workers in southern Iraq and in Iran, by getting over every religious and national divide.

Workers’ unity is the best weapon against wars and exploitation. In the Middle East and throughout the world. A new internationalism with class unity and solidarity is more and more urgent.

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