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Israel / Palestine is not a nice place to live in — it is a war zone

Ilan Shalif

March 2002

Israel / Palestine is not a nice place to live in — it is a war zone. It developed gradually as a Zionist project supported by the Western empires for more than 120 years. It belongs to the family of settler colonialist projects which tried to build new European-like nations in colonies. In the case of Israel this involved the immigration of Jews from all over the world, mainly from the less developed countries, and the expulsion of the indigenous Palestinians.

In spite of the efforts of the Zionist establishment with imperialist support there are still more Palestinians in the region after all these years than the 5 million Jews. Due to the agreements at the end of 1948 war Israel could not get rid of all the Palestinians living in the territories occupied in that war and it had even less success in the territories occupied in the 1967 war. About one million Palestinians live as second class Israeli citizens. Another one and a half million live in the tiny Gaza strip occupied in 1967; About

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Retrieved on 16th December 2021 from struggle.ws

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two million more live on the West side of the Jordan, also occupied in 1967; More than two millions are on the East side of the Jordan (in the kingdom of Jordan); and more than half a million live in the refugees camps of Lebanon and Syria.

Till this day the majority of Israeli's remain Zionists and dream of the big Israel. Some of them dream of the biblical borders including the East side of the Jordan and Golan heights... The majority of them dream 'only' of the territory west of the Jordan... of course without the Palestinians. Before the peace agreement with Egypt most of them added the Sinai peninsula to their Zionist dream. Reluctantly however, the majority may agree with a 'painful compromise' including equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, but it does not yet include the return to the 1967 borders, and the taking of responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem (mainly in the 1948 war) . Nor does it include agreement that the Palestinian state be entirely sovereign and independent of any Israeli authority.

The Oslo agreement was an effort of the Israeli Zionist establishment to bribe the national leadership of the Palestinian refugees who were exiled from the occupied territories. One aim, the secondary one was obvious — so they would stop the armed struggle against Israel. The second one, the essential one was the expectation that in return for giving them the right to return and a kind of autonomous rule for them and the elite of the Palestinians in the occupied region they were supposed to extinguish the flames of uprising within the parts of Palestine occupied in 1967.

The background of increased resistance by the Palestinians and the global increase in fundamentalist Islam has also made the imperialist powers uneasy. The Oslo agreement was intended to make the Palestinian state a neo- colony of the Israeli capitalists — both a source of low wages workers and a captive market. It was supposed to enable the settlers to continue with their projects in parts of the occupied territories.

oppressing and discriminating mechanisms — will put end to the conflict ignited in the region by the super power states and the Zionist project they nourished.

Such a solution is both worth fighting for and dreaming of.

However, in the Oslo agreement Israel promised more than they intended to fulfill, and immediately they started to apply economic pressure and the suppression of freedom of movement, in order to prepare to obtain additional concessions from the Palestinians in any final settlement.

The refusal of the Israelis to fulfill the agreement according to timetable and the exposure of Israel's conditions on the final settlement of conflict removed the possibility of the Palestinian elite surviving such an agreement so the second Intifada started in October 2000. All through the last 16 months, Israel has increased the pressure on the Palestinians of the occupied territories, and on their elite. However, it seems that the Israeli elite have started to realize that they cannot force the Palestinians to accept the settlement as they planned due to military and political circumstances, and that the long term preservation of the status quo is also out of the question due to two main processes

The ability of the present Israeli elite to continue the pressure is hampered the most by growing internal pressures. These have resulted recently in a sharp increase in opposition to the war.

The first factor is the split within the elite between the older Zionist establishment and the emerging capitalist section who suffer from the decline of the economy due to the war. The tourism industry has collapsed. The markets for local products are constricted both within Israel, in the occupied territories and in the markets of the neighboring Arab countries; 'The peace bonus' for the Israeli capitalists is in the process of slowly vanishing. The commercial contacts of exporters suffer because buyers do not dare to come to the region. The increased suppression of the Palestinians has decreased their availability as cheap workers.

The second more threatening factor is the growing dissatisfaction of the working class. The unemployment rate among the Jews, and even more so among Israeli Palestinians, has risen over the last few years due to neoliberalization and globalization (lowering tariffs, "export of work intensive industry", up to 10% of working peo-

ple formally employed as manpower companies,) accompanied by huge number of “guest workers” (brought to appease the Israeli capitalists). The contribution of the uprising of the Palestinians to the economic hardship is clear for all to see — including the drastic climb of unemployment — over 10% among the Jews and nearing 20% among Israeli Palestinians.

Against the back ground of the general recession in the capitalist world system, and the local aggravation, the increased use of terror and guerilla tactics by the Palestinian resistance has made the life of many unberable. The fact that in spite of the harsh Israeli retaliations the uprising continues, makes people start to doubt the government in all spheres.

The pluralistic nature of the Jewish citizens of Israel can be seen in the following example: The collapse of the Oslo agreement due to the failed Israeli efforts to blackmail the Palestinian leadership into further concessions they could not impose on their people, resulted in the second Intifada. This uprising of the Palestinians added to the world economic crisis and influenced Israelies in very serious ways. On top of this you can add the failure of Sharon to force the Palestinians into submission, even using the harshist measures possible, which only resulted in an increased level of terrorist acts and guerilla struggle. When it was made clear he intended to continue the ugly efforts to force the Palestinians to submission, but with out probable success and resulting in harsh retaliations from the Palestinians, the fermenting discontent started to soar.

The latest expression of this discontent is the petition of reservist commanders of elite units. They declared that they will refuse to serve in the occupied regions of the 1967 war. This petition during the last first weeks of February rose from 50 to 250 signatories. It is explained by them declaring that the continuation of the occupation is a war crime they refuse to participate in.

The terrorist acts of Israel in January 2002 are on the background of relatively lower intensity of Palestinian activity. During the time they occurred the media was full of predictions of provocation

turning refugees, while a very high percent of its population will be dependant on the Israeli economy.

A “state” like this will not only be a Bantustan, but also a social and political ticking time bomb and for sure it would be not any kind of solution.

This is the reason we do not find any value in searching for or offering any solution for the present or the near future. However, there is a strong reason to put forward principled demands worth fighting/struggling for:

1. Immediate and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli army from ALL the territories occupied in 1967 war.
2. Recognition of the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination.
3. Cancellation of all the discriminatory rules that Israel has and replace them with fully equal rights for all those who live in Israel .
4. Recognition of the right of the Palestinians (“refugees”) to return to their homeland.

All the solutions offered by the Israeli and Palestinian “left” based on equality are impossible to achieve in the near future (if at all): “two states for two nations”, “state of all its citizens”, “bi-national state”, “secular and democratic state”... Are they worthy to fight for in the long run?

All these “solutions” take for granted the hierarchical structure of the state and not contesting the capitalist system. Within the capitalist system these reformists solutions are impossible to achieve and are not even worth dreaming of.

Only a social revolution of all the region (as part of change in the social order of all the world) which will abolish the capitalist exploitation and the hierarchical structure of the states and other

Declaration — May 2001 (*unofficial text of small libertarian communist group in Israel*)

The occupation continues, the occupation will continue, is there any solution? [excerpts]

The truth is now there for all to see: there is no peace agreement between Zionist Israel and the Palestinian Arab people, and there will never be. Zionist Israel is a state which adheres to discrimination between its Jewish citizens (and actually all the Jews of the world), and the rest of its citizens.

Zionist Israel is a state that stubbornly refuses to mend, even in minor steps, wrong doings it inflicted on the Palestinians. It not only refuses to dismantle the settlers' colonies and to allow the return of any number of the refugees, it even refuses for more than 40 years to let the evacuees of the villages Iris and Burma return from neighboring places despite the Supreme Court verdict.

Every agreement achieved in the short run between Israel and the Palestinians will express the present power balance between an occupying force and the occupied, between the oppressor and the oppressed between the strong and the weak between the masters and the enslaved. In other words, every agreement that will be achieved in the near future will be based on the trampling of the Palestinians as a people and as individuals.

The solutions suggested for the present are based on "compromise" between two sides that are not equal. The formula for a "Palestinian state besides the Israeli state" is in the present conditions a big fraud. Even if Israel will agree in the near future to the establishment of such a state ruled by the PLO, it will necessarily be like a Bantustan in the time of Apartheid in South Africa: A state divided into at least two parts, with no real army, with only partial control of its borders, ground and water; A state inflicted with high unemployment, flooded by hundreds of thousands of re-

from Sharon based on his behavior in the previous months. The attacks were supposed to prevent peace talks with the Palestinians, and they succeeded... As a result people who only suspected it and people who knew but needed a clear proof started the beginning of revolt. It was expressed clearly in the more pro capitalist media, which reported more, and more on Israeli war crimes. It was highlighted when in the main respected capitalist daily and weekend supplements there appeared calls for resisting service involving war crimes.

This call to resist military service was not the first. Nor was it the first to appear as an ad in the respected dailies but it was unique in two ways: First, it was signed by combat commander reservists who are the backbone of Israeli power. The second, one third of the costly ad was paid by the most prominent heart surgeon in Israel. In addition, public polls revealed 15% to 32% public support for the commanders who published the original petition. (The difference in support is due to the measure and kind of support described in the polling question.)

In the first two Saturdays of February we even had big demonstrations of a few thousand participants supporting the petitionaries and calling for an immediate end to the occupation.

However, the interests of the Israeli capitalists, and the Israeli workers to put an end to the continued conflict (because of its cost) are not big enough to overcome the interests of those who refuse any compromise with the Palestinians, and those who gamble that the increased pressure will yield a better settlement. People continue to ask when and what will be the end of the conflict between the Zionist settler colonialist project in the region, and the local Arab people — mainly the Palestinians.

The old secular nationalist Palestinian solution offered, was that only one secular state with equal rights for all citizens and with the right of return to all refugees of 1948 and 1967 wars of Zionist occupation will resolve the conflict.

The old Israeli libertarian communists (Jews and Palestinians) solution (since 1962) was that only social revolution in the whole 'Middle East' region which will respect the self determination of the working people of Jewish origin, can recruit them to the side of revolution, put an end to the Zionist settler expansionism, and resolve the conflict between the Jewish citizens of Israel and the Palestinians.

But the developments of the last years of struggle point towards the possibility for a capitalist peace . This was both enabled by change in the power balance of the region of the last 10 years or so, – the collapse of the USSR and the absorption of the region into global capitalism. (More so for Israeli capitalism, but also that of the emerging capitalism of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and even Syria.) The capitalist peace is conditioned on the completion of that shift of the power in the region to the modern capitalist elites in both the Israel and its neighbors.

One dominant factor is the increase of the relative power of the classic capitalist class of Israel – who in all the years profited by exploiting the labour of the Palestinians. All through the years (since the beginning of the Zionist project) the Palestinian workers could be hired for about 1/2 to 1/3 of the wages of organized Jewish workers. All these years the capitalist class preferred to exploit them rather than expelling them as the zealous Zionists wanted. The privatization of the previously held industry and services according to the neo-liberal recipe contributed immensely to the diminishing power of the old elite, the settler colonialist bureaucracy and the capitalist interests local and abroad cooperating with it.

The other factor is the increased militancy of the Israel working people and their wish for a comfortable life at the level of the European working class. The more the number of second and third generation descendants of the original immigrants rise the less and less the working people are motivated by nationalist false consciousness/ideology and the more possible seems a compromise with the

Palestinians, Especially as the Israeli working class are now suffering the consequences of neo-liberalism which has resulted in high unemployment, less secure employment, and a halt to the previous continuous increases in living standards.

The third is the actual absorption of a significant part of the Palestinian refugees into the capitalist system and the promises of further absorption if the conflict will be resolved. Both for the uprooted peasants and the working people who are no longer forced to be in idle in refugee camps, and the Palestinian capitalist class. Now, they may have the option of exchanging their nationalist Dreams for the option of living in a relatively modern capitalist state.

The decrease in power of these interested in the continuation of the conflict; the increase of the capitalist interests who want to exploit the Palestinians and the workers of neighboring countries , the interests of the European countries in decreasing the appeal of fundamentalist Islam trends; and the decrease of the willingness of Israeli workers to be used as cannon fodder point to a new optimism It seems that like in other countries the most despised settler colonialist system will be replaced by a still despised, but less so, modern capitalist system.

One can see the growing awareness in Israeli society that the Israeli Palestinians cannot be kept much longer as second class citizens and that the efforts to subdue the Palestinians into submission to a Bantustan solution under Israeli rule have no chance to succeed. And most of all we can see the growing awareness that the continuation of the conflict is costing too high a price.

It might be that the latest Israeli attacks are the last throw of the dice both initiating a harsh Palestinian response and mounting Israeli internal opposition. If the Israeli side will consent to let the Palestinian capitalists manage their own independent state in the 1967 borders with minimal adjustments the Palestinian elite may be able to solve the refugee problem with the economic support of the rich countries.