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Club Educational Study Guide: The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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Readings: PWW, 4/6/02 all articles on subject, especially CPUSA statement PWW, 4/13/02 all articles on subject, especially article by Sam Webb PWW, articles in subsequent issues

Background Information

1. Occupied Lands Since the 1967 and 1973 wars, Israel has occupied the West Bank (the land between the Jordan River and the Jordanian border), the Gaza Strip, the Syrian owned Golan Heights and East Jerusalem.

2. Internationally agreed solution Under UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and the Saudi peace plan, unanimously approved at the recent Arab League meeting, Israel is to withdraw completely from these areas back to the boundary existing prior to the 1967 war. The Palestinians are to have a recognized state in that territory with East Jerusalem as its capital and there is to be a right of return for the Palestinian refugees. It is understood on all sides this last point does not literally mean all the refugees will return to their original homes, whether in Israel proper or in the Palestinian state. This is to be negotiated in terms of where the land will be for the refugees, whether monetary compensation, etc. In return, Israel is to have secure borders and the Arab states pledge to normalize relations with it.

3. Oslo Accords Under the Oslo Accords of 1993, Israel was to withdraw in stages, with a final accord to be based on the above propositions generally accepted by the international community. The various governments of Israel postponed withdrawals and encouraged, or in some cases permitted, continual expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, now involving 200,000 people in highly militarized communities. Up to the present, about 40 percent of the land area (containing the great bulk of the Palestinian population in cities and towns) has been turned over to the Palestinian Authority, headed by Yasir Arafat. Of this land, there is Zone A, in which the Palestinians have political, economic and security control, Zone B where the Palestinians and Israelis share security control and Zone C where Israel alone has security control. This is a patchwork quilt that completely disconnects Palestinian controlled areas from one another and cannot itself function as a Palestinian state. On a number of occasions prior to the present situation, the Israelis

have set aside even these arrangements by not living up to deadlines for withdrawals and have undertaken military incursions into the areas withdrawn from in the name of 'stopping terrorism.'

4. Barak-Arafat negotiations Since 1967, Israel has occupied the internationally recognized land on which the independent Palestinian state is to be established. Israel's general level of development is now that of monopoly capitalism and it has treated the occupied lands more or less as a colony. While the Barak Labor Party government, at a Camp David summit in the waning days of the Clinton Administration, moved toward accepting the international positions, as did Arafat, the issues of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and the right of return of the refugees were still being negotiated when Barak lost control of the Knesset and then the elections. In the meantime, Ariel Sharon, the leader of the right wing Likud Party, staged a provocation by being the first Israeli leader in recent years, to go through generally accepted Palestinian land to reach the Wailing Wall. A physical confrontation resulted which then provoked the start of the second Intifada (uprising for independence), originally with demonstrations and stone throwing. Sharon used these developments to scare Israelis into voting him into office.

5. Sharon's objectives Sharon has always opposed the Oslo Accords and has always supported the spread of the settlements. He has also not agreed to a Palestinian state extending to the 1967 line. Now Sharon refuses to recognize the Palestinian Authority or Yasir Arafat, who is the elected leader of the Palestinians and recognized as such by the UN and everyone internationally, including by the Bush Administration. Sharon has now taken military action to physically destroy the Palestinian Authority and all related institutions and to imprison Arafat. While there is evidence that Sharon's preferred solution is to expel or kill all Arabs within Israel proper and all Palestinian Arabs, it is abundantly clear that the only thing he would settle for is a compliant, neocolonial state on part of the occupied territory and with the remaining settlements. It follows that anything less than the full terms of the international positions, including the Saudi plan, is unjust and the position of the Sharon government is unjust and can never be successfully imposed.

6. Objectives of the Palestinian people The struggle of the Palestinian people is a national liberation struggle of an oppressed people for full national rights and statehood, as a developing country, and for an end to colonialism and neocolonialism. It is, therefore, a fundamentally just struggle.

7. Attacking civilians There are some Palestinian groups, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, that do not accept the existence of Israel as an independent state. Currently they engage in armed action, including suicide bombing against civilian targets. This is an unjust position since the people of Israel, Jewish and Arab, also have a right to their own independent state. It is now a matter of international law, that purposely making war on civilians is unlawful and immoral, as is military action in reckless disregard for the lives of civilians, which the Israeli military is conducting in the West Bank, and the U.S. has been conducting in Afghanistan. Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade reportedly has ties to Fatah, the home organization of Arafat. It accepts the existence of Israel but its military actions include suicide bombing against civilians. It is clear such suicide bombing against civilians plays into the hands of Sharon and reactionary forces. The Passover Seder bombing was the excuse for the present extremely brutal invasion of the Palestinian cities, towns and villages. Arafat has once again condemned suicide bombing against civilians, but he has justly claimed the right of the Palestinian Authority to resist the Israeli military invasion.

8. No military solution It is generally recognized internationally and by the bulk of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples that neither side can achieve their basic objectives by military means and must find a political solution of peace and justice through negotiation.

9. U.S. imperialism's objectives. With some important variations in policy, U.S. administrations have wanted a militarily and economically superior Israeli junior partner as a regional gendarme against the Arab liberation movement and Arab left, which the U.S. views as a threat to its strategic oil and gas interests in the region. The U.S.

has, therefore, supported Israel in its conflict with the struggle of the Palestinian people and other surrounding Arab peoples by political means in the UN and elsewhere and by military and economic means. Each year the U.S. pays for \$3 billion in arms and close to \$1 billion in economic aid, or 40 percent of the total of such U.S. aid worldwide. While the Bush Administration has been compelled to recognize the necessity of a Palestinian state, it too wants one compliant with U.S. and Israeli imperial interests and has not defined its position on the issue of the 1967 borders, the settlements (though officially opposed to their further expansion), the Palestinian refugees or East Jerusalem.

10. Current Sharon objectives When the Arab League endorsed the Saudi peace plan, Sharon was seeking a way to ignore it or side track it and avoid clearly opposing it. The Passover suicide bombing provided a way to accomplish that as well as to launch the long-planned invasion to destroy the Palestinian Authority and seek to replace Arafat with a puppet, under cover of 'rooting out the terrorist infrastructure.'

11. World reaction Reaction around the world to the violence has left the Sharon government isolated and branded. This has included a unanimous UN resolution calling for immediate military withdrawal. The European Union countries have begun to undertake sanctions. Mass demonstrations have taken place across Europe, the Arab and Muslim countries, in cities across the U.S. and in Israel. Over 1,000 reserve officers in Israel have refused to serve in the occupied territories and 20 have been imprisoned for being 'refuseniks.' In the U.S., the National Council of Churches and particular denominations, peace and solidarity organizations, the AFL-CIO, civil rights and civil liberties groups and women's organizations have called for immediate withdrawal of the Israeli military and for an end to suicide bombings against civilians and for peaceful negotiations for a Palestinian state. Hundreds of Jewish leaders and activists have supported the 'refuseniks' through a New York Times ad, and the Times has editorialized against some of the Sharon government's actions. Now UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has called for an immediate international peace-keeping force.

12. Bush & the ultraright The Bush Administration, which originally gave Sharon a green light for the invasion and continues to put the main onus on Yasir Arafat, appears to have concluded that Sharon's actions go too far and are threatening wider U.S. interests in the region. These include the threat of popular demonstrations overthrowing Arab governments like Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Bahrain and others, and undermining Bush's ability to prepare a military attack on Iraq. There is apparently a division in the ranks of the ultra right, with Republican House Whip Tom DeLay, Pat Robertson, William J. Bennett and others egging Sharon on to smash the Palestinians militarily and opposing the Colin Powell mission and any restraints on Sharon. This is done in the name of being consistent with a hard-line internationally against all forms of 'terrorism.' Unfortunately, a large section of the U.S. Jewish population is falling prey to the entreaties of right-wing Jewish leaders, on grounds of the suicide bombings and Israeli security, to support the Sharon policies and to oppose any U.S. efforts to rein in Sharon and withdraw the army. As a result of these pressures and the obstinacy of Sharon, the Bush Administration effort to get Sharon to cool it - for their own reasons - is only being implemented half-heartedly, instead of insisting on immediate withdrawal and serious negotiations, backed by the threat of withholding aid.

13. Party and club action Maximum effort is needed to build up the widest pressure on the Bush Administration for peace with justice along the lines indicated above. It is also necessary to expand our efforts to influence people's thinking here at home through teach-ins, ads, forums, etc. As always, to be effective this must be done with a sensitivity to the concerns of people here in the U.S., which will be somewhat different from people in any other country, although our objectives are in keeping with those everywhere who fight for peace with justice.

Discussion questions:

1. How do you explain the terms of a solution to this crisis with peace and justice as discussed in the readings?

2. What are the objectives of Israeli ruling circles and the Sharon Government? What are the long term objectives of U.S. ruling circles and of the current Powell mission? What are the objectives of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority?

3. What more can your club do to help win peace with justice?

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