

Programme of action for Palestine

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The starting point for a revolutionary party's programme in Palestine and the surrounding countries must be the struggle against imperialism and its wide variety of local agents. The world-hegemonic imperialist power-the USA with its fleets in the Mediterranean and the Gulf defends its oil and the semi feudal rentier regimes it props up in the Arabian peninsular with a limitless arsenal. Yet as its ignominious fiasco in Iran and its inglorious retreat from Lebanon shows it is far from invincible when the masses are roused against it even under the most appalling leadership. This leadership whether Stalinist, bourgeois nationalist or clerical reactionary can however only score partial and limited victories against the USA and its agents.

Militarily the Israeli state is a formidable supplement to the forces of imperialism, socially and economically rooted as it is within the region. But its massive strength derives ultimately from the huge economic support given it by the US and European imperialist bourgeoisies and the Zionist bourgeoisie world wide. Whilst it acts as an agent of imperialism as a whole in dividing and disciplining the Arab world it has its own projects and interests that clash from time to time with the projects of one or other of the imperialist powers-even with those of the USA.

So essential to the USA is the existence of the Zionist state that it is repeatedly forced to adapt its overall strategy and tactics for controlling the region to the wishes of its Israeli ally. Most frequently undermined and sabotaged are its relations with its Arab clients (Mubarak, Hussein and the Saudi rulers) who it is repeatedly obliged to abandon and swindle.

The world strategic interests of the Soviet bureaucracy and its ability and willingness to give military and economic aid (armaments, advisers and loans) have enabled various bourgeois Bonapartist regimes (Nasser, Assad, Hussein, Gaddafi) to play the anti-imperialist and even defy the USA tactically for a whole period. In turn these regimes have influenced and moulded the PLO through its various factions.

Yet these bourgeois nationalist Bonapartes, despite all their anti-imperialist and even socialist demagoguery, despite their claims and aspirations to unify the Arab nation or Islam against the Yankee and Zionist menace have repeatedly surrendered to them at the decisive moment. In reality they are competitors to Israel for imperialism's favours.

What are the real anti-imperialist objectives facing the proletariat of the Middle East? Who are its allies and who are its enemies? What demands must it take up both in its own interest and to win to its side these allies? Its open enemies and their slavish semi colonial puppets are clear enough to millions although illusions may exist in the Japanese and EEC imperialists who from time to time, jackal-like, try to seize some morsel from under the nose of the US lion by playing up their own moderation and peaceable nature.

Whilst it is legitimate to take tactical advantage of any contradictions within the imperialist camp, to entertain any illusions in for example Britain, France, Italy or Germany-old plunderers or would-be

plunderers of the Middle East and architects of its Balkanisation-could lead only to defeat and catastrophe. Nor should the workers' movement entertain any illusions in the Stalinist or social democratic lackeys of these imperialisms when they weep crocodile tears over the wrongs of the Palestinians.

Labour, Socialist and Social Democratic leaders have long supported and encouraged the Zionists and fettered their 'labour' leaders in the Socialist International-that below-stairs version of their masters big 'thieves kitchen', the United Nations. In neither and through neither will the masses of the Middle East see their violated national rights redressed.

Nor can the bourgeoisie and the military caste of the Arab states which temporarily resist direct imperialist control or its dictates, provide the leadership of a successful struggle against imperialism. Firstly, neither Nasser and Sadat nor Assad were able to defeat the Israeli armies, backed as they were by US economic aid. Leaving aside their ability as strategists Egypt and Syria alone or together were not economically or militarily able to overcome the Zionist forces. 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 have all proved that Israel cannot be defeated from without, by conventional military means and that the bourgeois Arab generals cannot lead the Arab masses to victory.

Still less can the battle cries of Islam and the clergy unite the Arab world in a successful jihad. Their reactionary utopian political slogans will alienate all the minority national and religious communities of the region and repulse women who have nothing to hope from them except a return to medieval conditions.

The working class alone can provide the solid social force capable of sustaining a real revolutionary party which can lead all the dispossessed and impoverished-the poor farmers, the camp dwellers, the sub-proletariat of the huge cities, the self-sacrificing intelligentsia in an assault on imperialism and all its agents-Arab as well as Zionist.

The first step is to create the nuclei of revolutionary parties, independent of all bourgeois and petit bourgeois forces not tied to any strategic deals with the exploiters and oppressors of the working class. Class independence is the beginning of all wisdom. From the 1930s onwards the powerful influence of Stalinism with its strategy of the popular front and the revolution by stages has led the proletariats of Palestine, Egypt, Syria and Iraq to various Bonapartist dictators or petit bourgeois parties or fronts, demanding first national liberation and a popular democratic regime, then at a later stage socialism.

The working class and its immediate and historic needs have been sacrificed on the altars of these false gods. In the 'independent' Arab states the proletariat has seen its trade unions and political parties repeatedly crushed and its best fighters martyred by 'anti-imperialist heroes' whose standing amongst the masses was sedulously promoted by the Stalinists.

Against the popular front of class collaboration and betrayal the working class must fight for class independence, for an alliance between the working class and the urban and rural poor organised in 'soviets' and for anti-imperialist united fronts of struggle whenever the fight reaches the stage of open conflict. The united front must be based on the principle of the right and ability of the workers' parties as well as those of the petit bourgeoisie to organise separately, openly and democratically but to fight together loyally and with iron discipline against the common enemy.

There must be no confusion of programmes and strategy and no suppression of any party's right to express them or to make criticisms of each other. As for the parties or forces tied to the bourgeoisie we cannot expect them to ally with us or to prove a reliable ally should exceptional attacks by imperialism momentarily force them to do so. As for the Arab bourgeois states in conflict with imperialism their 'gifts' can be accepted only on the spear's point, that is, with no conditions as to control of the struggle or the

leadership of it.

They are the class enemy even when imperialism forces them to seek the proletariat and the peasantry as allies. In each separate country the proletariat must seek as its main support the proletariat of the surrounding states and must defend their interests as its own. No 'stage' must act as a barrier to the proletariat's advance to power. A workers' state in the Middle East would be a massive blow to imperialism, an able arsenal and fortress for all the oppressed. The seizure of power therefore must be the goal of our programme. But to rally the forces and create the conditions to make this possible we must take up all the immediate and partial, the democratic and anti-imperialist demands that are in the interests of the masses.

The Palestinian urban and rural proletariat has shown that it can fight-not only because generations of its bravest youth have taken up arms against Zionism and imperialism in guerrilla struggle and alongside the 'regular' forces in the Arab-Israeli wars but also in the mass actions of the 1987-89 uprising on the West Bank.

Guerrilla warfare can never be a strategy for victory, despite the justification of guerrilla tactics in certain periods and the need for a defence militia to protect the mass struggle and inflict punishment on the occupiers and aggressors. Whilst the proletariat must defend the heroes of the guerrilla forces it cannot share their strategy which tends to oscillate between negotiations and concessions and individual acts which though heroic are all too often doomed to defeat from the outset.

The proletariat erects its strategy along the path of mass action; the demonstration, the strike, the uprising the building of trade unions, workers' and peasants' councils, women's committees and a popular militia. In the present period the key factors that proletarian revolutionists have to address are:

- (a) US and European imperialism's attempts to create a disarmed Palestinian mini-state on part or all of the West Bank, under the guardianship of King Hussein.
- (b) The commitment of the Fatah majority within the PLO to a West Bank statelet and the recognition of the state of Israel and the abandonment of the struggle against the Zionist state that this would entail.
- (c) The uprisings of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Israel proper against Zionism's military brutality and against the appalling conditions under which they live.
- (d) The division of the Israeli ruling class with the Likud led forces seeking to sabotage the US-EEC plans and with the Labour Zionists seeking to accomplish the creation of a helpless Bantustan where the 'surplus' Arab population can be utilised in the South African fashion to make permanent an Israeli Jewish majority in Israel and keep a pool of cheap Arab labour close at hand.
- (e) The continued guerrilla actions of the Palestinian fedayeen and the interaction of the whole Israel/Palestine situation with the class struggle and inter-state rivalries of the Arab world.

Revolutionary communists must be prepared to intervene and take united actions with progressive forces on all these issues but from a strictly independent class standpoint. Thus we should oppose the imperialist project of a West Bank Bantustan.

? No PLO recognition of the Zionist state's right to oppress 650,000 Palestinians. No abandonment of these Palestinians!

For a united struggle against national oppression. Smash the Zionist state. Support the mass uprisings

against Zionist terror and occupation. Broaden it into a struggle against all aspects of national oppression and super-exploitation suffered by Arab workers and peasants!

Strengthen the organisations of the working class, trade unions and workplace committees. Build workers', village and camp councils to forward the struggle!

? Build a mass defence militia. Down with the Zionist occupation and brutalising of all Palestinian towns, villages and camps. Israeli troops out! Jewish workers who oppose the occupation: do not avoid conscription into the reserve. Organise soldiers against the occupation inside the army. Organise within the army to get units to refuse to serve in the Occupied Territories. In the Territories fight the brutality and politicise the disaffection within the army. Organise rank and file soldiers' committees. Link up with the Palestinian resistance.

? Build fighting unity with all Jewish Israeli organisations willing to defend the democratic rights of the Palestinians and oppose repression. For solidarity wherever possible with the Jewish Israeli proletariat's economic struggles against the bourgeoisie. Defence of their democratic trade union rights. Proletarians of all nationalities unite!

? Critical support for the struggle of the guerrilla organisations against the Zionist state against imperialism and against the treacherous Arab bourgeoisie. For an active defeatist position towards the Zionist state in any conflict with an Arab bourgeois regime. Defencism with regard to both the PLO and the Arab regimes does not and must not signify abandonment of the political struggle against both, preparing the working class for their betrayals and their inability to fight Zionism and imperialism!

At no stage must the working class abandon its struggle to unite and lead all the exploited and oppressed against the Zionist state and to create a workers' state in Palestine which would recognise and defend equality of rights for the Arab and Israeli Jewish nationalities, their language and culture. This can only be achieved by mass struggle, by the disintegration and destruction of the Zionist armed forces, that is, by an insurrection that breaks the ability and will to resist of the Zionists. To achieve this objective the working class and its revolutionary party must take up a whole series of struggles (democratic, trade union, poor peasant) that will rally forces to the workers' side and disintegrate the class alliance of Zionism.

To win the masses to action one must take up and defend their vital interests here and now whether these interests can be satisfied by the existing state or whether their realisation requires its destruction and indeed the abolition of capitalist ownership of the large scale means of production.

Thus within the whole of the borders of historic Palestine and indeed in the surrounding states where Palestinian refugees live we must fight for a programme of demands to abolish the awful conditions of the camps. This would require a massive programme of public works to build decent houses, hospitals, schools and centres for social life and recreation, install running water and sewers, electricity and heating to pave the roads and provide a good public transport service. Who should pay for it? The American, Zionist and European imperialists and Arab millionaire bourgeoisies and feudalists. How to force them-for certainly they will not do so out of the goodness of their hearts? Take action against their businesses in Palestine, throughout the Arab world and summon the proletariats of Europe, the USA and Asia to assist.

This must not be a call for charity but for restitution and recompense for generations of plunder of the Palestinian people. And such a massive public works programme should be under the control of the unions and local committees of the Palestinian workers and camp dwellers. They should plan and execute everything.

The Palestinian workers' unions should fight for full trade union rights and absolute independence from the state. They should be open to all workers who wish to fight for their interests on the basis of class solidarity and oppose national chauvinism and privilege. They should support Jewish workers in every progressive trade union and political struggle they undertake (i.e. for higher wages, against inflation, against rationalisation or austerity measures and in defence of their social welfare gains). In return the Palestinians should demand equal wages and equal social welfare conditions with their Jewish class brothers and sisters. Together they should fight for the full programme of transitional anti-capitalist measures (the sliding scale of wages and hours, against inflation and unemployment, workers' control of production, workers' inspection of all aspects of the economy, nationalisation of industry, commerce and banking etc). They should fight under the slogans:

? Jewish workers break out of the company union, the Histadrut, instrument of class collaboration and Zionist chauvinism!

? For an anti-racist union movement open to all Arab and Jewish workers!

? For militant class struggle and workers' democracy!

? For a workers' party to fight for a workers' state!

A revolutionary workers' party faces a whole series of democratic demands mainly affecting the Arab workers and peasants but the Jewish workers should remember Marx's dictum: "A people that oppresses another cannot itself be free". Any serious crisis for the Zionist state will see the restriction and destruction of bourgeois democracy for Jewish workers, intellectuals and progressives too. The most important and general demand is to end the forty year separation of 2-3 million Palestinians from their own country:

? For the right to return of all Palestinians!

? Down with the internal borders and all restrictions on movement between "Israel", the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem!

? For free elections for all municipal authorities and the legalisation of all political parties including the PLO and its constituent organisations!

? Absolute equality of the Hebrew and Arab languages in state, business, education etc!

Repeal all repressive and emergency regulations and release all political prisoners!

For the dissolution of the Israeli defence forces and police and the replacement of them with an integrated popular militia!

? For the summoning of a sovereign constituent assembly based on universal suffrage of all Palestinian-Israeli citizens over the age of 16!

These demands should be fought for amongst Jews and Arabs. No consistent or sincere democrat can oppose them. If the mass struggle around democratic slogans leads to the shipwreck of the Zionist state before the workers and peasants are convinced in their majority of the need to establish a workers' state based on soviets then revolutionaries-while giving no support to the objective of a bourgeois state (i.e. a secular democratic republic)-should fight for the convening of a sovereign constituent assembly based on an armed popular militia.

Revolutionary communists should fight in the elections to such an assembly and in it if it were convened,

for a programme that can resolve the national antagonisms; granting the fullest democratic freedoms to both nationalities now resident within Palestine and posing the only social and economic and political basis for doing this--a workers' state and a planned economy. Such a programme must be a programme of transition based upon:

? The nationalisation of all land and its working on a collective or co-operative basis with the restoration of the returning Palestinians full right to participate equally in the farming sector. To make this possible a massive development of the neglected areas of Arab land ownership would be necessary to raise its productivity. Private property in the land is an anachronism and can only be a continued instrument of national antagonism. Of course, collective ownership cannot be imposed on small peasant farmers. They must be won to it via a process of co-operative working when they see its economic superiority.

? The nationalisation under workers' management of all large scale industry and its co-ordination under a democratically decided upon central plan! ? The nationalisation of the banks, financial institutions and large scale commercial institutions!

A workers' state would grant absolutely equality to all peoples and languages in political and cultural life making state facilities available to fully develop and protect cultural expression in both the Hebrew and Arab languages with full rights for minority languages (Yiddish etc).

This equality and absence of all coercion would extend to the Israeli/Hebrew speaking people themselves once the national oppression of the Palestinian Arabs had been ended and the Zionist state destroyed. Revolutionaries would of course not advocate separation. Quite the contrary. But it would be far better for the Palestinian Arabs to freely facilitate a democratic and equal separation where the Israelis wished it than to exert the slightest coercion themselves. Of course, there could be no question of yielding to an undemocratic minority of hardened Zionists in collusion with imperialism who were acting as a vendée against the Palestinian workers' revolution.

The programme for permanent revolution in Palestine, for an uninterrupted strategic advance from democratic and transitional demands in today's conditions to a workers' state, should not be seen as a schema of peaceful or gradual advance. On the contrary the Zionist bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers will not yield to persuasion--to the weapons of criticism. War, revolution and counter-revolution gave birth to the Zionist state and will undoubtedly bring about its destruction.

A living flexible but principled programme will have to be applied and re-applied in action programmes suited to every fundamental change of conditions or decisive shift in the balance of forces or the arena of struggle.

Firstly the Palestinian revolution is intimately and indeed inextricably linked up to the political fate of the immediately surrounding lands; Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Palestinian revolutionaries should seek the closest links with revolutionaries in these countries. The existence of huge Palestinian refugee communities in these countries makes this involvement easier and imperialism and Zionism's repeated interventions makes Palestine almost a domestic issue in all these states. The fate of their class struggle could be of the greatest importance to the struggle within the Zionist state. The overthrow of a Mubarak or a Hussein could alter the whole balance of forces. A new Arab/Israeli war could also create conditions where the external and internal destruction of the Zionist state could coincide.

There is a political slogan which expresses the goal of a Middle East united against imperialism and led by the working class and poor peasants: the socialist united states of the Middle East. It is profoundly more progressive than other goals aimed at unifying against imperialism. That the idea of a united Islam is a

reactionary utopia we have already stated. Reactionary because it would not be a democratic but a theocratic state, imposing religious law on non-believers. It would be utopian in that it could hardly unify Sunni and Shi'ite Islam let alone the many sects and minority religions. Pan-Arab nationalism whilst largely a secular ideology also has reactionary and utopian features relative to national minorities-Berbers, Israeli Jews, Kurds within Arab countries-and it cannot unite with overwhelmingly non-Arab states such as Iran. A socialist united states of the Middle East would allow for separate states or autonomous regions for every nationality, would allow for the real national consciousness that distinguishes Palestinians, Syrians, Egyptians, Iraqis to be both expressed and resolved in a state form capable of completing the struggle against imperialism. Thus and only thus could the Balkanisation of the Middle East be ended and the world proletarian revolution carried a mighty step forward.

? Down with the imperialist powers-exploiters and oppressors of the peoples of the Middle East!

? Smash the Zionist state-instrument of imperialism!

? Victory to the national liberation of the Palestinian people!

? Critical support to even bourgeois Arab states in economic or military conflict with imperialism and Israel!

? Unconditional but critical support to the PLO's military struggle by the proletariats of the imperialist countries!

? For permanent revolution in Palestine and the Middle East!

? From the national democratic struggle to the proletarian revolution!

? No to any form of confessional state! For a workers' state in Palestine!

? For revolutionary communist (Trotskyist) parties in every country as a part of a refounded international!

For a socialist united states of the Middle East!

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