



What is the invasion of Lebanon about?

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After invading and occupying Afghanistan and Iraq the Anglo-American alliance, with various European supporters, has focused its attention on undermining the relative independence of Iran and Syria. Blair and Bush have made it clear that here too they seek regime change - i.e. to install compliant puppet regimes, which promote globalisation and submit absolutely to their 'war on terror'. The occupation of Iraq has turned into a bloody quagmire for the US, so an immediate and unprovoked attack is neither militarily nor politically possible.

Thus it has set out to weaken these regimes and embroil them in the so-called war on terror. It has blamed Syria and Iran for fuelling the resistance in Iraq. It blames too the resistance of Hezbollah to Israel on Syria and Iran. For this reason it has planned, with the Zionist state, an attack on Lebanon to crush and expel Hezbollah. It hopes that a defeat for Hezbollah will massively undermine the will to resist of the Syrian and Iranian regimes, as their isolation grows.

American imperialism and its allies are the enemies of the workers, poor peasants and oppressed nations and races of the whole globe. A defeat for these exploiters of the world in Lebanon would be a massive blow for every progressive struggle, including the fightback against neoliberalism in the imperialist heartland themselves.

Therefore it is in the direct interest of workers, youth, all the exploited and oppressed around the world to rally to the side of those fighting back in Lebanon, Gaza and the West bank today. It is no hopeless struggle either. The heroic resistance of the Lebanese, added to that of the Palestinians, Iraqis and Afghans, if united to another wave of mass mobilisations to these wars of conquest, can shake the system to its foundations

Frustrated Israel launches ground war

Despite nearly four weeks of unremitting bombardment of Lebanon by land, sea and air with the latest high-tech munitions, supplied by the USA, the Israeli Defence Forces still occupy only a few kilometres in the border region of southern Lebanon. In stark contrast to their meagre military successes on the ground is the scale of their attacks on the civilian population.

Huge damage has been done to the country's infrastructure, so painfully rebuilt after the end of the last Israeli occupation and civil war. According to the Lebanese government over \$2 billion worth of damage was done in the first week of the bombing alone. The promise of the Israeli Defence Forces chief of staff to put Lebanon back twenty years has been fulfilled. The human damage too has been enormous. Over a thousand Lebanese civilians have lost their lives in this period, some 45 per cent of them children. Upwards of a million people have been turned into refugees.

Nevertheless in both Tel Aviv and Washington - where this monstrous war of aggression was plotted and planned - there is now deep dissatisfaction with the results. For the first time in decades, beyond the occasional suicide bombing of a bus or a restaurant, war has really come home to Israel. Hezbollah rockets have repeatedly hit Haifa, Israel's third largest city. Sixty civilians have been killed and 100,000 Israelis in northern Galilee have been forced to flee their homes.

The war was not a knee jerk response to the capture of two Israeli soldiers by Hezbollah. It was prepared for any such pretext, when it arose. It was planned and rehearsed for months, if not years before, according to security expert Gerald Steinberg of Bar-Ilan University. He told San Francisco Chronicle (21 July 2006) that plans envisaged an intensive three-week operation: a first-week air assault on Hezbollah's longer-range missiles, command system and logistic support; a second-week assault on individual missile-launcher sites and stores; and a third-week limited ground

offensive against what remained. The expected result would be a totally crippled Hezbollah but without the need for a long-term occupation of southern Lebanon. The plan failed in spite of the savagery of the air attack: 8,700 sorties, attacking 4,600 targets in the first phase.

Despite this bombardment, Hezbollah only lost around 50 fighters in the first four weeks and still has around 10,000 missiles, including a hundred longer-range ones that can reach deep into Israel. Far from taking over southern Lebanon up to the Litani river, IDF commando units, which cross the border to engage Hezbollah militia, are retreating back to Israeli territory each night. This method has been forced on them by the deadly effectiveness of Hezbollah units, using anti-tank missiles, both against Israeli armour and in targeting IDF units whenever they have tried to establish posts in the area. Jonathan Steele reports a near-absence of Israeli troops there, just burnt-out or crippled tanks. (Guardian, 7 August)

In short, so far the Israeli Defence Forces – the fourth largest army in the world, armed to the teeth with the latest high tech weapons by its transatlantic master – have signally failed to defeat around 3,000 Hezbollah fighters. Israeli generals have hesitated to launch the threatened all out ground war, fearful of the casualties they could suffer if they took on the guerillas on their own terrain, in the bombed ruins of their own towns and villages. But the fear of handing an enormous victory to Hezbollah has, it seems, finally convinced them to launch a ground offensive

The War for Peace

Worse for Israel and the USA, the bombing attacks have united the religiously and politically fractured Lebanese people, reversing at a stroke the effects of the American inspired and funded ‘cedar revolution’, which Washington hoped would make the country a docile tool of its policy of conquest and plunder. Of course Israel still has many ‘friends’ in the corrupt élite of the state, originally carved out of Syria by French and British imperialism after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, but most journalists testify that the Christian and Sunni as well as Shi’a masses, which make up 40 per cent of the population, are now cheering on Hezbollah and blaming Israel and the USA.

Its mass expulsion of people, horrific destruction of houses, roads and bridges, and above all its heartless massacre of children have given rise to an unprecedented wave of hostility in the West – reflected in the 100,000 strong march in London on 5th August. A revival of the mass movement that opposed the launching of the Iraq war is likely in the coming months. Sympathy for the resistance is open and widespread, as is its linkage to the anticapitalist and antiglobalisation struggles in Europe, Asia and the Americas. Millions now see the occupations of Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine as part of an imperialist offensive to take over or dominate the globe. But most important of all it has raised the hopes of the millions across the Middle East that Israel and US imperialism are not invincible, that its takeover of their region is not inevitable, that resistance is possible and necessary.

For this reason Washington and Tel Aviv are now frantically trying to wrest the banner of peace from the hands of their opponents. After three weeks of bloody massacres and arrogant refusal to consider a ceasefire, the spin masters are trying to present Blair and Bush as the peacemakers. Their aim is quite simply to win by diplomatic arm-twisting what their soldiers could not win on the battlefield. They want Lebanon and the other Arab states to ‘expel’ Hezbollah from their own land and people. The United Nations Security Council resolution calling for a ‘full cessation of hostilities’ is a cynical ploy, aimed at allowing Israel to continue its attack on Lebanon, whilst pretending that it is Hezbollah and the Lebanese government that has turned down the opportunity for peace. The United States and France drafted it to achieve just this end in collusion with the Israeli government.

However, this ploy is too nakedly cynical – coming as it does from people, whose hands are still bloody from the slaughter of innocents in Lebanon, from an Israel that is still bombing and openly debating whether to launch 20-30,000 troops in a full scale invasion to seize the country up to the Litani river. It appears too that France has been unable to ‘deliver the Arabs’, in the words of a BBC commentator. In Israel a frenetic debate has erupted against a background of mounting evidence that the Israeli offensive in Lebanon has been as much of a military fiasco as it has been a horrendous war crime against innocent civilians.

The alternatives are to press on with a full-scale invasion with all the risk of big Israeli casualties, or to accept a

negotiated ceasefire with Hezbollah and regroup for a renewal of the offensive later. The danger of the latter course is that it will be seen as (and will in fact be) a stunning victory of the Hezbollah David over the Israeli Goliath. It will enormously encourage all sorts of mass resistance to the USA and to its various puppet regimes around the world around the globe, as well as the armed struggles in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Undoubtedly, if the rotten 'peace deal' being wrangled over in New York finally collapses, because the Arab regimes and Lebanon do not dare to sacrifice Hezbollah to 'peace' with Israel, for fear of their own peoples' reaction, they will announce that Israel is justified in resorting to a full scale offensive and should receive the blessings of the so-called international community. The whole procedure within the UN Security Council since the start of the war confirms Lenin's view 'expressed about its predecessor the League of Nations' that it is a thieves' kitchen, where the oppressed and exploited peoples and their countries' sovereignty and resources are divided up like so much stolen goods.

The United Nations 'ceasefire' resolution

The proposed 'ceasefire' resolution embodies, in the most brazen manner imaginable, the goals of imperialism and its Zionist agent, aimed at dividing and ruling the oil-rich regions of the Middle East. Hezbollah must stop fighting and submit to a process of disarmament, whilst at the same time Israeli forces are still occupying Lebanese territory and are free to 'defend themselves'. The resolution calls only for a 'cessation of hostilities' until a French-led force is deployed, not for an 'immediate ceasefire'. Whilst it demands that Hezbollah immediately cease all 'attacks' on Israel the latter is asked only to cease 'offensive military operations'. Since Israel interprets all its actions as self-defence, it will doubtless continue to hit Hezbollah targets. The draft resolution also calls for a second stage, a permanent ceasefire, to be based on the disarming of 'all armed groups in Lebanon' under UN resolution 1559, and the deployment in Lebanon of an 'international force' under Chapter VII of the UN Charter to implement a 'long term solution' acceptable to Israel.

The resolution also embodies the Israeli lie that the war was instigated by Hezbollah, i.e. because of the latter's 'abducting' two Israeli soldiers. It demands the 'unconditional release' of these, whilst promising only to 'encourage the efforts aimed at resolving the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel'. It does not demand an end to the Israeli siege of Lebanon by land sea and air. Indeed, it states that the country's air and seaports will be reopened only for 'verifiably and purely civilian purposes.' Lebanon will thus lose effective sovereignty over its own borders. In short, it extends the imprisonment of the Palestinian people to the Lebanese.

In short, these incredible conditions 'which effectively destroy Lebanon as a sovereign state' disarm the only force, which has defended the country over the past quarter century and forced out the Israeli occupiers in 2000. The recent offer of the formerly very pro-American Siniora government to send 15,000 Lebanese troops to the south, if Hezbollah withdraws, will doubtless be met with the bitter enquiry at home, 'why did you not send them when Israel attacked our country and started destroying our economy and massacring our citizens?'. Any disarmament of Hezbollah would put Lebanon directly under imperialist and Zionist tutelage.

Israel's Justice Minister, the increasingly hawkish Haim Ramon, summed up the view from Tel Aviv: 'Even if it is passed, it is doubtful that Hezbollah will honor the resolution and halt its fire. Therefore we have to continue fighting, continue hitting anyone we can hit in Hezbollah, and I assume that, as long as that goes on, Israel's standing, diplomatically and militarily, will improve.'

Imperialism versus the people of the world

The atrocity in Qana, in which over 54 Lebanese civilians, 37 of them children, were slaughtered, has caused horror and outrage around the globe. Meanwhile Israel is continuing to starve and terrorise the imprisoned population of the Gaza strip, subjecting them to nightly aerial bombing and shelling. The aim is plainly to oust the democratically elected Hamas administration in Palestine. This has passed with virtually no comment from the governments, who consider themselves the embodiment of 'western civilisation'.

Israel is also proceeding with the extension of the notorious Apartheid Wall and with stealing as much as it can of remaining Palestinian land on the West Bank. The so-called Road Map peace plan, occasionally given lip service by

Bush and Blair, is a dead end. What Israel hopes to get the duo to tolerate is a series of unilateral withdrawals from the least habitable and economically viable parts of the West Bank, once the population there has been disarmed and subdued. In other words, the original Zionist lie that Palestine was 'a land without a people' continues to be realised, by driving out its actual people (ethnic cleansing), grabbing their land, and settling it with Eastern European economic migrant and racist North American settlers.

This Israeli attack on Lebanon is not a rogue action by the ultra-right wing Zionists; it is an integral component of the inescapable mode of life of the expansionist settler state. That is why it has the full support of the Israeli Labour Party, Ehud Olmert's coalition partner, as well as the Israeli right around Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud. Labour leader Amir Peretz, former head of the Histadrut trade union federation, is the defence minister directing the war effort. Likewise with Israel's master, the USA, this war is not just a project of the neocons and weird Christian Zionists. The Israeli offensive has wholehearted support from the Democrats. On 20th July, the House of Representatives voted by an overwhelming 410-8 margin to support Israel's actions as justified self-defence and rejecting the calls for a ceasefire.

In Britain too, despite a growing opposition from the governing Labour Party's MPs, demanding the recall of Parliament, few have openly denounced Blair's backing for Israel's mass murder. In the European Union, Germany, under Angela Merkel, is firmly on message. Even in Italy the new centre-left Unione coalition of Romano Prodi has done nothing to obstruct the US or Israel getting approval from the EU. France alone originally voiced its misgivings, but then joined in brokering the present 'ceasefire' proposal aimed at disarming resistance to Israel.

It is clear that the United States, Britain and Israel have been able to mobilise de facto compliance to their policy and strategy from all the major powers in Europe. This despite the fact that the European Union has given millions in aid to Lebanon to establish the very infrastructure destroyed by IDF bombs and artillery over the last month. And despite France and Germany's opposition to the Iraq war in 2003, and their diplomatic and economic overtures to the Arab regimes since the collapse of the Soviet Union. What this illustrates - as did the UN's support for the occupation of Iraq following the 'victory' the US won in six weeks in 2003 - is their continued economic and military subordination to US imperialism that expresses itself particularly in times of social and political crisis.

Israel is an expansionist colonial settler state that serves the direct interest of US imperialism. Its huge economic and military aid completely overshadows the relatively piddling trade agreement that it signed with the European Union in 1995, despite its geographical proximity to the latter. However, Israel also plays a role for the European Union too, in that it ensures the continued compliance of the oil rich nations, through its economic and military dominance of the Middle East. They may grumble, when America and Israel destabilise the situation by 'extreme' acts of aggression, but in the final analysis they cannot afford to do without this self appointed Middle Eastern police force, knowing that an 'anti-imperialist' Middle East would be as big a disaster for them as it would for the US. The result is a 'soft cop' foreign policy that fears the destabilising effects of US/Israeli aggression, but in response seeks to negotiate the compliance of the Arab regimes (often offering some form of economic aid in return for concessions).

The Israeli attack was fully coordinated with the Bush administration. The latter supports it to the hilt because it is an integral part of its own plan to occupy key strategic positions within the Middle East and Central Asia, and helps weaken and divide the two remaining states of the region which minimally resist this plan, Syria and Iran. The US aim is to turn even them into client states on the Jordanian, Egyptian and Saudi model. These 'rogue' states support Hamas or Hezbollah as a pressure point on US imperialism and its Zionist guard dog, looking for a negotiated settlement with the USA. Vain hope. They too have to be broken and subjected.

But given the outcome of the imperialist powers' invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq - swiftly conquered, but impossible to subdue - the US is wary of launching an invasion of either of the recalcitrant states. Rather they have turned to Israel, their regional guard dog, to crush Syria and Iran's allies in Lebanon and Palestine. In this process, pretexts might be found for, at the very least, bombing Syria or Iran in order to 'degrade' their economic and military powers of resistance.

The USA's strategic commitment to the Israeli war to smash Hezbollah and the elected Hamas government in

Palestine, too, is the cause of Bush and Blair's initial blockage of any sort of UN or EU resolutions, which call for a ceasefire or make the mildest criticism of Israel (e.g. calling its massacres and deliberate population expulsion 'a disproportionate use of force?'). Their supposed commitment to a permanent settlement to the Palestinian question (the so-called Road Map) is quite simply a cynical manoeuvre. Their actual preconditions for 'meaningful' negotiations are that Israel remains the regional military superpower, with its vast US-supplied arsenal of high-tech weaponry, with its own nuclear 'weapons of mass destruction?', and that the Palestinians and their allies in Lebanon be totally disarmed. Only thus will the Palestinians be rendered powerless to resist the Zionists' diktats.

Everyone in the Arab and Muslim world, who is not effectively a pensioner of the Americans (like the Saudi and Jordanian monarchs or the Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak), sees this clearly enough. This is why the hatred for Israel's Anglo-American backers will continue to grow in the region and in the huge Arab/Muslim diaspora in the West. That is why 'terrorism' (a weapon the militarily weak use against the strong) will grow, the more such attacks take place.

The 'war on terror' is not a response to terrorist acts like 9/11 or 7/7 but a result of the USA, UK and Israel's own war to conquer and pillage the Arab and Muslim world for its oil riches. It is a war waged by the USA and its allies by means of mass terror aimed at civilian populations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. It will inevitably continue to produce the small-scale counter-terror of the suicide bombers. This in turn will give the pretext for the rapid erosion of democracy that is going on in North America and Europe. The imperialist powers and Israel are not greatly perturbed about this since it gives them a magnificent pretext to continue to destroy democracy 'at home' by a series of antiterrorist laws.

But the resistance of the Lebanese under Hezbollah, of the Palestinians under Hamas, of the Iraqis and Afghans spearheads a popular resistance of entire peoples. It draws the support of the great mass of the people of the region, despite their craven governments. The latter are suppressing, in every way they can, any outbreak on the streets because they know that, if the first slogans were aimed at Israel and the USA, the next would be aimed at the cowardly kings and presidents, who have not lifted a finger to help the resistance to imperialism.

More importantly this mass resistance is succeeding in inflicting defeats on the occupiers and invaders, despite heavy odds when it comes to all the high-tech panoply of modern war. Why? For the reason that guerrilla resistance forces have so often beaten their gigantic oppressors. Brutal repression in the aid of a reactionary cause, a cause that can never win the hearts and minds of the great majority of the people, can never be victorious in the long run.

Can Hezbollah and Hamas liberate Lebanon and Palestine?

Hezbollah is a mass movement, largely but not totally centered on the Shia Muslim community of southern Lebanon and the Bekaa valley. The Shia are among the poorest and most excluded parts of Lebanese society. After the 2005 elections, Hezbollah won fourteen seats in the 128-member Lebanese Parliament, gaining two ministers in the government.

Islamist politics amongst the Shia were stimulated by the Iranian revolution. Before that the Shia formed a major part of the large and influential Lebanese Communist Party. The crisis of Stalinism in the 1980s and 1990s weakened and splintered it, and the Islamists supplanted it as the main expression of radical resistance to Israeli occupation and incursions.

Hezbollah, like many Islamists, organise substantial social welfare programmes, building schools and hospitals. It thus developed deep social roots in the poorest, most exploited and most rebellious sectors of the population. In doing so, it borrowed its social programme from left wing parties - especially the Lebanese Communist Party, many of whose militants joined its ranks after the defeat of their party.

During the long Lebanese civil war and Israeli occupation of the south, Hezbollah gradually replaced Amal, the more conservative militia from which Hezbollah originally split, as the predominant force. It did so in part because of its militancy over social issues as well as its military prowess. But the latter is clearly a major factor in its growth. Hezbollah was born in the resistance to Israel's and the USA's occupation of Lebanon, including Beirut itself, in the

1980s.

The massive Israeli invasion in 1982, backed by the USA, was aimed at driving out the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and its forces. Israel only succeeded with the aid of genocidal massacres like those in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, where 1,700 PLO fighters and thousands of civilians were killed by Israel's allies, the Phalangist militias, encouraged and directed by IDF forces under Ariel Sharon.

But the PLO's role of front line fighters against Israel and the US was immediately taken over by Hezbollah. It carried out the bombing of the US embassy in Beirut in April 1983, in which 63 were killed, and the truck bombing that slaughtered 241 US marines and 56 French paratroopers in their barracks, in October of the same year.

They also bombed the Israeli Defence Forces headquarters in Tyre, killing 75 soldiers. These stunning blows led to the ignominious withdrawal of the US and French occupiers from Beirut and the retreat of Israeli occupation forces to the southern border region. Hezbollah was finally responsible for driving out the Israelis from there in 2000. No wonder the USA and Israel have a score to settle with Hezbollah.

No wonder, too, many Lebanese and Arabs in general see it as one of the few effective military forces that have inflicted painful defeats on Israel and its US master before. Hassan Nasrallah, who became the charismatic leader of Hezbollah when the Israelis assassinated his predecessor, has tried to link Hezbollah with other non-Shia and even non-Muslim anti-imperialist movements, and has declared his solidarity with Hugo Chavez. He combines Islamism with Arab and indeed Lebanese nationalism.

As a Shia, his Islamism is quite distinct from the Wahabi fundamentalism of Bin Laden, whom he often criticises. He condemned the 11 September 2001 attacks on the twin towers, condemned the pre-2002 Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a repugnant regime that discredited Islam, has been the target of an al Qaeda assassination attempt, condemns sectarian attacks between Shia and Sunni in Iraq as weakening the resistance.

The political backing of Syria and Iran is very important to Hezbollah. They provide arms, including medium and short range missiles, support and money. Hezbollah, too, has recently won important support amongst Christian politicians, particularly the former premier Michel Aoun. The Israeli bombing of Christian areas, meant to mobilise the inhabitants against Hezbollah, has, in some measure due to this alliance, backfired.

Though Hezbollah has a remarkable record of resistance to Israel and its repeated attempts to turn Lebanon into a docile buffer state, though politically it champions the oppressed and downtrodden sections of society, its radicalism should not be overestimated. Its ideology and programme are, indeed, thoroughly bourgeois. Just as Hamas, after its election in January 2006, mooted the possibility of dropping the destruction of Israel from its effective programme; so, too, Hezbollah could forego its right to defend southern Lebanon from Israeli attack. What could be the prize worth ditching this right for? A seat at the table of Lebanese confessional politics, alongside the Druze, Sunni and Christian Phalangist parties.

In fact Hezbollah did not initiate this war as a liberation war for the Palestinians. It was, by capturing the Israeli soldiers, genuinely seeking nothing much beyond an exchange of prisoners. It has been seriously discussing merger with the Lebanese armed forces and disarmament of the southern border, if a UN sponsored peace with Israel could be won. Like Hamas, its leadership has discussed peace deals not so different to those proposed by the PLO in the past. The radicalism of Hezbollah is rooted in and must be credited to the will to resist of the southern Lebanese population to constant Israeli attacks as well as their economic and social exploitation and exclusion. This revolutionary spirit of the masses, like that of the Palestinians produces militant anti-imperialist movements. However these deserve a more consistent and radical expression than can ever be provided by Islamism.

Hezbollah's strategic solution for both social and national oppression is an Islamic republic, based on religious law. Despite the fact that it insists that this cannot be imposed on society by a minority, but only by democratic means, this would be an inherently reactionary goal. Any state, which is based on absolute (because supposedly divine) laws, which regards the sovereignty of the people as an infringement of the sovereignty of God, and which is expressed by

the rule of a clerical hierarchy, will be a highly oppressive one, as is Iran today. One, where women are condemned to social inferiority, gay people to inhuman punishments, other religions to a grossly inferior status, free trade unions are banned or suppressed, and private property (and thus capitalism) is sanctified.

Revolutionary communists must therefore oppose Islamism and seek to win the poor and exploited from its influence. Whilst temporary alliances in combat against imperialism are both permissible and necessary, not for one minute can working class militants collude with the idea of supporting an Islamist government or state. We defend democratic rights, the secular character of the state and education, and independent working class organisations (parties and trade unions) against all attempts to ban or 'Islamise' them.

What is to be done?

The progressive forces worldwide cannot simply stand by and call impotently for a ceasefire, nor even just cheer on the Hezbollah fighters. We must do all in our power to help them to defeat the Bush-Blair-Olmert axis of terror. The urgent task of the anti-imperialist, antiwar and anticapitalist movements worldwide is to speed the day of their defeat by coming to the aid of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance now. Massive demonstrations like that in London must continue through the summer, culminating in another 15th February 2003 style global day of action on 23rd September. The pacifist slogan of 'ceasefire now!' in the context of a war is misleading and wrong. Of course Israel should cease firing on Lebanon and Gaza. But we do not call for a single minute on Hezbollah to cease their justified resistance. We demand that Israel withdraw completely and unconditionally from Lebanon and its waters, and that it pays for the reconstruction of Lebanese homes, towns and villages, and infrastructure, under workers control.

The task of the anti-imperialist, anti-war and anticapitalist movements worldwide is to come to the aid of the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance by exposing the horrific crimes of Olmert, Bush and Blair and making it impossible to continue with them. We call on workers in transport and communication, in civil airports ' on working class soldiers and sailors too ' to halt the shipment of munitions to the murderous Zionist aggressors. We call on the working class movement to take direct action against this foul colonial war. We must fight for walkouts from schools, colleges and workplaces, boycotts of Israeli goods and companies, of western corporations which give aid to Israel. We must win workers in transport and communication, in civil airports to halt the shipment of munitions to the murderous Zionist aggressors. Since they are already transferring their cargoes of death to military airfields we must call on working class soldiers and airmen to refuse the orders to handle them. We call on the working class movement ' especially dockers, rail and road transport workers ' to take direct action against this foul colonial war by boycotting Israeli, US and British firms, which back the Zionist settler regime.

The worldwide antiwar movement and the European Social Forum has called for internationally coordinated action against Israel's war . They have issued important calls for action. The trade unions, the organisations of students and youth must respond to these calls by planning action in the workplaces, in the schools and universities, up to and including strikes, if possible. We must call not simply for an end to the support for Israeli aggression, but for an end to all economic and military support for Israel, the immediate and total withdrawal of all imperialist forces from the countries and bases they occupy in the Middle East and Central Asia. The working class movement of the countries carrying it out must oppose the thinly disguised re-colonisation of these countries. The masses in the region suffering this takeover and plunder must be helped and encouraged to challenge overthrow the jailers imposed on them, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, King Abdullah of Jordan, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, as well as the puppet regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In Lebanon, Palestine and throughout the Middle East, revolutionary communists and working class militants must not stand aside from the ongoing struggle to defeat imperialism. They must not resort to the excuse that, because at the moment it is lead by politically and socially reactionary Islamist forces, they must remain neutral. It was precisely because the Stalinist Communist Parties and the secular Arab nationalists became embroiled with governments and regimes that capitulated to imperialism, leaving the Islamists to spearhead resistance, that the prestige of socialism and working class politics has sunk so low in the region. It can only be restored by participation in the ongoing struggle against imperialism and its Zionist agent. In fact, if worker militants quite rightly do not wish to see more such Islamist

governments come to power, then they must occupy the front ranks of the struggle against imperialism. The alternative ? abstention ? will actually strengthen forces seeking to enslave women, persecute religious minorities, ban free trade unions, and protect capitalist property.

The Lebanese people as a whole must resist Israeli aggression. Rank and file soldiers should form councils and demand their right to assist Hezbollah defend southern Lebanon, and exercise that right even against their officers. Workers in the besieged cities and towns should likewise form councils to requisition buildings and goods and draw up and execute emergency plans to relieve the desperate situation that a million displaced citizens find themselves in. Form workers? militia to protect urban centres from further attacks, and issue a call for the working class of neighbouring Arab states to come to their aid: turn off the oil to Israel and its backers. Workers, soldiers and poor peasants must demand that the Lebanese government fights Israeli aggression, not just with words, but with all the economic, military and political means at its disposal. The best way to fight imperialism and its Zionist ally is through a workers? revolution.

Neutrality between the imperialists and the Islamists would be a fatal policy. It will ensure that the latter win all the prestige of active struggle and the fruits of victory too. Genuine revolutionary communists must offer the masses the goal not a repressive theocracy, but of national and social liberation, equality and an end to exploitation. A society free of these scourges can rise only on the foundations of a socially owned and democratically planned economy, which mobilises the region?s huge human and natural resources to abolish poverty and inequality. This can be brought about only by a working class led revolution, one that will burst the old colonialist drawn borders and sectarian divisions and create a Socialist United States of the Middle East.

Communism can only be reborn as a mass force if it rejects any idea of limiting the revolutionary struggle to a stage of idealised ?democratic capitalism?. It can be reborn in the Middle East, as everywhere only on the basis of the strategy of permanent revolution, associated with the name of Leon Trotsky, the co-leader of the October revolution. This strategy means starting from the fullest involvement in today?s struggles against imperialism, fighting alongside those Islamists, who today occupy the vanguard of mass struggles. It means recognising that they do so because of the past weakness and capitulation of ?secular forces? ? bourgeois and petty bourgeois Arab nationalism and Stalinist ?Communism?. And it means contesting with the Islamists for leadership of the movement, struggling politically against their bourgeois strategy and goals, pointing always to those aspects of the Islamists? reactionary programme that holds back the struggle of the masses ? its oppression of women, its failure to appeal to workers from non-Islamic religious backgrounds, its hatred of independent working class organisation, its support for private property and the rule of the rich. It means that the alliance of the working class and Islamist forces will last only as long as the Islamists are fighting imperialism, and is based on the absolute independence of the working class forces at all times. Finally, it means that, when the working class comes to the head of the anti-imperialist revolution, it will not stop halfway but will go on to form workers? and peasants? governments based on councils of recallable delegates, to expropriate the property of the landlords and capitalists, and to spread the revolution across the Middle East.

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