

Stop the slaughter! Israel out of Lebanon! Stop rocket attacks on Israeli civilians!

An open letter to a demonstrator against the war on Lebanon

Comrade,

THIS is a demonstration against Israel and the USA. We are together here because we oppose the policy and “strategy” of Bush and Blair, and because we share all or most of the following opinions about the war in Lebanon.

i) It is a war in which Israel, militarily very powerful, has bombed Lebanese civilians, in the process - it says - of targeting Hezbollah.

ii) It is not a defensive war forced on Israel by an imminent threat from the Hezbollah in South Lebanon. It is a pre-emptive strike.

iii) It is, or so the Israeli government proclaims, part of the Bush-Blair “war on terrorism”, and therefore a ‘companion piece’ to the 2003 war and occupation of Iraq, whose consequences are still bloodily unfolding in that country.

iv) Israel’s war and its relationship to the whole Arab and Islamic world is inseparable from its continued occupation of the West Bank, and its intention to unilaterally fix a border that would leave a large chunk of the West Bank Israeli.

v) It is, to at least some extent, a proxy war between - on one side - the US (with Israel as its proxy), and on the other

Iran, with Hezbollah as its proxy.

vi) You want the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza.

These things are common to you and us, though we might disagree on the exact meaning of some of these points. You are right to recoil in horror at scenes of chaos, death and destruction that Israel’s military might has wrought on the Lebanese and Palestinian people. In opposing this slaughter we agree. But it is also important to explore our differences. You may be marching today because, in addition to the points above, you hold to some or all of the following ideas.

A) An international war is going on between the forces of imperialist reaction - led by the USA - and the forces of ‘liberation’, which includes Hezbollah and Iran.

B) Israel is the Middle Eastern representative or stooge of imperialist reaction.

C) Those, such as the Iranian and Syrian governments, Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Qaida and those fighting the Americans and British in Iraq, are all progressive forces because they are ‘anti-imperialist.’

D) “Palestine must be liberated from the river Jordan to the sea.”

E) Israel is a racist state, and

Israeli nationalism and “Zionism” are racist ideologies.

F) Israel must be replaced by an Arab or Islamic state, within which Jews who accept the new arrangement will have religious freedom and the same civil rights etc. as others.

G) The war in Lebanon is only the latest front in the general confrontation between imperialist reaction and the forces of progress, in which the conflict in Iraq and in Gaza and the West Bank are other fronts - and you are for the victory of Hamas, Hezbollah, the ‘resistance’ in Iraq and, if it comes to open conflict, of Iran and Syria.

Comrade,

FOR our part, we are on this march because we think Israel’s war in Lebanon is unjustified. We want the war stopped. We want a viable peace established. We also want Hezbollah attacks on Israel, including rockets, stopped. But we think most of the ideas and more or less all of the policies advocated by the leaders of the ‘Stop the War Coalition’ make no sense and are, in fact, downright reactionary.

In addition to the points in the first list above which we share with you, we also think socialists and consistent democrats — and

in the first place International Socialists in Israel and the Arab states — must support and fight for the following settlement in the Israeli-Arab conflict. The working class of Israel and the Arab states is the key to the future of the Middle East.

1) Though we oppose what Israel is doing in Lebanon and Palestine, we believe that Israel has a right to exist and, in principle, the right to defend itself.

2) We want an end to attacks by Hezbollah, Hamas and others — whether raids, rocket attacks or suicide bombings — on Israel. We want an end to the deliberate citing of Hezbollah and Hamas rocket-bases in densely populated civilian areas.

3) We want the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state with its own contiguous territory.

4) We support the right of the Jewish majority in Israel to have a national state, as long as the majority of its people want that — or, more precisely, as a Jewish majority state in which the 20% Israeli-Arab minority will have full and equal rights of citizenship.

5) Israeli nationalism is, like all nationalism, for instance Irish nationalism, which is

widely accepted on the left, 'exclusive'. It is the nature of the thing. Israeli nationalism is not, per se, 'racist' (or, if it is, then all nationalism is indistinguishable from what we rightly stigmatise as 'racist'). Israeli nationalism is as legitimate as any other nationalism — the product of the 20th century experience of the Jewish people.

6) The normalisation of Israel's relations with the Arab states and its recognition by all Arab states (even now, 58 years after the establishment of Israel, only Egypt and Jordan recognise it).

7) We want an arrangement

“The working class of Israel and the Arab states is the key to the future of the Middle East”

whereby at least some of the Palestinians who wish to be allowed to settle in Israel, and Palestinian refugees and their descendants (and it mainly is now a matter of descendants) are compensated.

8) An end to all talk by Arab and Islamic states — such as that recently by the President of Iran — that they intend to destroy Israel.

The differences between us — between the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and those who organise and speak in the name of this march and the Stop the War Coalition in general — are expressed in the contrasts between lists 2 and 3 above. They express major political differences. What are they?

a) We support the PLO position for a two-states arrangement between Israel and the Palestinians — an independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory side-by-side with Israel.

b) We think that the historical account of the origins of Israel now most widely accepted on the left is not history but poisonous **mythology**, which originates in the Stalinist movement of the late 40s and early 50s. We say that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, and other Arabs, and non-Arab Muslim fundamentalists, is not something that can be blamed only on Israel.

The state of Israel emerged out of the forced population movements generated by the greatest crime in recorded history, the slaughter by the Nazis and their allies in other European countries of 6,000,000 Jews. It is not the result of a 'Zionist' or other 'conspiracy', nor was it created simply by 'imperialism' (except indirectly and unintentionally by Russian Stalinist imperialism, which — through its then puppet state, Czechoslovakia — broke the then international embargo on armaments for Israel). The UN in 1947 decided to partition Palestine — an entity that had existed for a mere 30 years — between the two peoples living there: Two states for the two peoples. The proclamation of the state of Israel in May 1948 led to an immediate invasion by Egypt — proclaiming its goal to be to “drive the Jews into the sea” — Iraq, Syria, Jordan and contingents from other Arab states. Seconded British officers led some of the Arab forces.

c) In the course of that war, 750,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven out of the Israeli territory.

d) The territory of the putative Palestinian state decreed by the UN was taken by Jordan (the West Bank) and Egypt.

e) In the first years of Israel's existence, 600,000 Jews fled or were driven out of Arab countries to Israel. The refugees — and their descendants, who today number millions — remained refugees because they were refused citizenship rights and the right to work in the Arab countries in which they lived.

The contrast with what happened in Germany in the mid-40s puts this perspective; it is

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an indictment of the Arab states. No less than 13,000,000 Germans were driven out of the East, 10,000,000 out of East Prussia (now western Poland) and 3,000,000 from the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. They came west, penniless, many dying on the way, to a war-prostrated Germany. They and their descendants were assimilated in the then West Germany.

e) After 1948, the Arab states refused any 'recognition' of Israel other than a de facto military truce. The Six Day war of June 1967 in which Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza was a pre-emptive strike by Israel against the open threat of war, and preparations for war, by Egypt. Afterwards, the Arab states refused to make peace or recognise Israel. They continued to preach its destruction. The forces of chauvinism and expansionism have become powerful in Israel because of the stalemate with the Arab states — interrupted by wars — over the last 40 years.

f) Israel's close relationship with the US came after the 1967 war. Some Arab states too - Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, for example - have had close relations with the US and Britain. In terms of the facts, Israel cannot be seen as an 'imperialist stooge'. It allies opportunistically with American imperialism.

g) The Islamic fundamentalists of Hezbollah, Hamas, the Taliban, al-Qaida, the Muslim Brotherhood (whose front in Britain is the MAB) and other similar political formations are, in political terms, clerical-fascists. (Similar to 1930s European groups such as the Blueshirts in Catholic Ireland, the forces grouped around Franco in the Spanish Civil War and after and the Salazarists in Portugal.)

They are utterly reactionary - especially in relation to the working-class, women, youth, etc. in their own countries.

To the loose "imperialism of free trade" of the dominant world capitalist powers, they counterpose not anything pro-

gressive, or even relatively progressive, but the reactionary programme of creating theocratic - military Islamic states, within which most of the conquests of world bourgeois civilisation, and of the working class movement, over hundreds of years would be eliminated. Iran after the Islamic Revolution of '79 and since is their ideal model and goal.

h) The only circumstances in which socialists would give such political forces any, even grudging, qualified and conditional, support would be a national resistance led by such forces against an attempt at national enslavement by way of old style colonialism. The last - very bloody - example of that in the 20th century was the 10-year Russian war in Afghanistan,

“We support the PLO position for a two-states arrangement between Israel and the Palestinians”

1979-89. Even then, socialists would back democratic and socialist forces within their own areas against such Islamic fundamentalist and clerical-fascist forces as Hezbollah and Hamas. In Palestine, we would back the PLO against Hamas.

i) The idea that clerical-fascist leaderships and regimes, though “we” would not like them to rule in the UK, are all that the people of certain countries are, for now, “ready for” - that, comrades, is a form of unconscious Western arrogance, chauvinism, and, even, ‘racism’. It is scandalously widespread.

j) If the clerical-fascists of Hezbollah, Hamas, al-Qaida etc. could be destroyed ‘surgically’ without the massacres of civilians we see in Lebanon, then

socialists would not regret it. The point, of course, is that they cannot be removed ‘surgically’ or by purely military means. Hezbollah may well come out of this war politically strengthened and with greatly enhanced prestige — as Egypt's President Nasser came out of the British-French-Israeli attack, in the Suez affair of 1956.

k) Except for Hamas, perhaps, in none of the areas of conflict between clerical-fascism and the US, Britain and Israel has it been a matter of the “left” supporting the Islamic clerical-fascists grudgingly, because they led a national resistance. Even the invasion and occupation of Iraq is not an attempt to make it an old-style ‘colony’. Still less is that what is happening in Lebanon. Insofar as Israel intends to annex part of the West Bank, Hamas can be said to lead a Palestinian national resistance there. In fact, the victory of Hamas over the PLO/Fatah - hailed with moronic joy by Socialist Worker - has been a major setback to the prospects of a Palestinian state; in the past, Israeli chauvinists have done their best to bolster Hamas because the existence in Palestine of an unreasoning clerical-fascist movement, proclaiming its goal to be the destruction of Israel, best served their needs in dealing

TWO NATIONS, TWO STATES: Socialists and Israel/Palestine

a Workers' Liberty pamphlet

For a socialist Israel and a socialist Palestine in a socialist federation of the Middle East. Israel out of the Occupied Territories - for a Palestinian state with the same rights as Israel!

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with the Palestinians as a whole.

l) The only time honest socialists in Britain, would ally with such forces as MAB would be in the physical defence of Muslim areas against direct racists or BNP attacks.

m) The current bloc of the left with Islamic fundamentalism is one of the most extraordinary things in the long history of the pseudo-left. Even more extraordinary is the support for the "resistance" in Iraq, which is mainly a movement of Sunni supremacists, whose long-domination of the Shia and Kurdish majority ended with the fall of Saddam Hussein.

n) The leadership of the Stop the War Coalition is not building an "anti-war movement", but a movement in support of the war-making of reactionary forces in the Middle East and elsewhere.

o) The slogan "for the liberation of Palestine" is reactionary nonsense, because it implies not a two-states solution (the PLO programme), but the programme of Arab chauvinism - the elimination of Israel. We think the idea of destroying a nation (Israel) is wrong in principle, but here the victims of this approach are the Palestinian Arabs themselves. For decades, they have been prevented by commitment to the unrealisable goal of destroying Israel from achieving what is genuinely possible - a Palestinian state, side-by-side with Israel.

The PLO formally adopted a two-states position in 1988. Those whose slogans and plac-

ards give this march its political colouration are far behind the PLO, and are open allies of the most reactionary - and, in terms of what best serves the Palestinians, the most stupid - Arab and Israeli revanchists and chauvinists.

p) The mainstream left support for the destruction of Israel is unique in our politics. The programme to destroy Israel is itself a form of anti-Semitism - not 'racism', but anti-Semitic nonetheless - and generates support for more conventional, old-style anti-Semitism. Israel,

"The mainstream left support for the destruction of Israel is unique in our politics"

accepted critically or uncritically, grudgingly or wholeheartedly, is part of the identity of most Jews alive - a product of the terrible Jewish experience of the 20th century.

In the late 19th century, Frederick Engels rightly said that there were two peoples who had a duty to be nationalist before they were internationalist - the Irish and the Poles. That ceased to be true of Irish nationalism in 1922, and of Polish nationalism when the

Russian empire collapsed in 1989. It was, it seems to us, true of the Jewish survivors of nationalism who fled to, set up, and defended Israel in the mid 20th century.

q) Any boycott of Israel - whether academic, economic or cultural - will at best, have the sort of marginal impact on Israel that the boycott movement against South Africa from 1960 until the collapse of the apartheid regime had. In practice, it will inexorably become a boycott movement which targets Jews in conditions like those in Britain. That will be its logic, its likely development, and the conscious policy of some out-and-out old-style anti-Semites who will opportunistically advocate it. The political boneheads who lead the SWP are, on their recent record, perfectly capable of targeting the most easily reachable "Zionists". Those who remember the banning of Jewish Societies in colleges in the '70s and '80s will not want to repeat that sort of experience on a much broader scale.

The urge to "do something" is understandable and politically honourable. But boycotts will do enormously more harm to the left and to societies like that of Britain generally than it can conceivably do any good for the Palestinians.

Two states for the two peoples!

**For more on
Israel/Palestine visit:
[www.workersliberty.org/
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WHERE WE STAND



The **Alliance for Workers' Liberty** is a Marxist organisation active in the trade union movement and in working class political campaigns. We fight for working class independence and self organisation against all oppressors and reactionaries, big and small. We believe in socialist revolution against capitalism and a society based on the democratic control of the majority over the means of production.

To find out more about the AWL and what we do, visit www.workersliberty.org or email office@workersliberty.org