

SEP presidential candidate Bill Van Auken condemns US-backed assassination of Hamas leader

“A savage act by a criminal regime”

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The Socialist Equality Party emphatically condemns the March 22 assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the spiritual leader of the Palestinian Islamic group Hamas. This cold-blooded state murder of a 67-year-old, blind and quadriplegic cleric as he was pushed through the streets of Gaza in a wheelchair constitutes a particularly savage act by a criminal Israeli regime.

Spokesmen for the government of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon boasted that Sharon had personally supervised the planning of the attack on Yassin. The murder was formally ratified in advance by a vote of the Israeli cabinet, which has descended to the level of a conclave of Mafia gangsters ordering a “hit.”

As Hamas leaders have charged, there is every reason to believe—despite half-hearted denials from the White House—that the killing of Yassin was carried out in explicit collaboration with the Bush administration, which shares the guilt for this cowardly crime.

There is no denying that the Apache helicopters and Hellfire missiles used to massacre Yassin and nine other people were supplied and paid for by the US government. The claim that an Israeli regime that is wholly dependent upon economic and military aid from Washington went ahead with this crime without obtaining a green light from the Bush administration is simply not credible.

The administration spent the hours following the killing attempting to justify it, even as governments throughout the world issued statements of condemnation. The official US reaction consisted of hypocritical appeals for “calm” and “restraint” mixed with statements declaring Hamas a “terrorist organization,” clearly meant to affirm that Yassin got what he deserved.

Can anyone believe that the killing of an elderly man in a wheelchair, nearly deaf and half-blind, will reduce the threat of terrorism? On the contrary, this crime will only create new recruits from among the desperately poor and oppressed Palestinian masses who are willing to sacrifice themselves in suicide bombings and other operations. With its backing for the Israeli state killings, Washington is only creating a further impetus for attacks on US citizens both at home and abroad.

This is not an accidental byproduct of the Sharon regime’s actions. It thrives on terrorism and deliberately provokes new terrorist attacks to provide itself with a pretext for further re-

pression and annexation of land. For years it has deliberately set out to foment chaos within the occupied territories with the aim of justifying its own military interventions and preventing the emergence of any viable Palestinian state or leadership.

Terrorist killings of Israeli civilians likewise serve the internal political interests of Sharon’s right-wing administration, which is fully conscious that its so-called “targeted assassinations” will serve as the trigger for more suicide bombings.

The Bush administration likewise welcomes new terrorist actions and is more than willing to back Israeli provocations that will create them. It has invoked a global “war on terror” as the justification for all its policies, including the unprovoked war and occupation in Iraq, the abrogation of fundamental civil liberties within the US itself and even the vast transfer of wealth from US working people to the financial elite. Having decided to run for reelection based upon posturing as a “war president,” Bush needs fresh acts of violence.

The latest Israeli assassination is part of an unending campaign of state repression that is designed to humiliate the Palestinian people and to convince them that resistance is futile. The Zionist state has perfected the techniques of psychological terror against an occupied people that were pioneered by the Nazis in Europe 60 years ago.

Yassin’s history is that of countless thousands of Palestinians of his generation. Born in 1936, at the age of 12 he and his family were forced to flee for their lives from Zionist forces, who bulldozed their homes and obliterated every trace of their Palestinian village. He and his fellow refugees were forced into the Gaza Strip, a narrow territory that became one of the world’s great focal points of poverty and oppression.

While the Israeli authorities now cast him as a terrorist mastermind, the history of their own relations with Yassin tells a different story. Israel jailed Yassin in 1983 on charges of forming an underground organization and weapons possession, but he was released only two years later. For several years thereafter, the Zionist regime gave tacit support to Yassin’s Islamic fundamentalist movement, seeing its growth as a useful counterbalance to the secular nationalists of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Only in 1989, after eruption of the first *intifada*, did the Israeli government again go after Yassin, arresting him and sentencing him to life in prison. He was subsequently released in 1997 in exchange for two Mossad agents who were captured in

Jordan after they attempted to assassinate a Palestinian leader in Amman.

Among the Palestinian leaderships, Yassin was viewed as a moderating force. He had recently advocated a truce with Israel in return for withdrawal from the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza and indicated his willingness to negotiate. The Sharon government has no interest in any such settlement or negotiations.

Israeli state terrorism—aided and abetted by successive US administrations—constitutes one of the principal reasons for the growth of Islamist terrorism and the mushrooming of anti-American sentiments throughout the region. Hundreds of millions of people in the Arab countries and throughout the Muslim world know that Israel's ruthless suppression of 3.2 million Palestinians would be impossible without unconditional support from Washington.

As with the war in Iraq, the American people will be denied the right in the 2004 election to express their opinion on the US backing for Israel and its potentially catastrophic consequences. Bush's Democratic opponent, Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts, is competing with the incumbent over who will be the most slavish defender of the Zionist regime.

In recent weeks, Kerry has described Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat as an "outlaw," while declaring Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—the architect of a long line of murders and massacres—"a leader who can take steps for peace." He has defended the policy of state-ordered assassinations of Palestinian leaders and militants and has endorsed Israel's building of a wall that will effectively annex even more Palestinian territory, while trapping some 1.2 million Palestinians in unlivable ghettos.

Under the administration of Bush senior, Kerry attacked the Republicans from the right for raising concerns about the expansion of illegal Zionist settlements in occupied Palestinian territory.

He, like the majority of his Democratic colleagues, has joined with the Republicans in awarding the Israeli government some \$3 billion to \$4 billion in US aid every year. Many billions of

dollars more are extended in the form of loan guarantees. This money goes to prop up a criminal policy—the sustaining of illegal settlements that represent a huge drain on Israel's economy and the funding of a massive military establishment that is used to slay and maim Palestinians in the occupied territories.

Kerry, like Bush, continues to insist that Israel represents a model of democracy, even as it denies the democratic rights of millions of Palestinians under a political setup based upon religious exclusion and social discrimination every bit as severe as what existed under South African apartheid. US tax dollars are propping up a country—armed with nuclear weapons—that defies international law, proclaims murder as state policy and is proceeding down a path whose logical conclusion is the expulsion or extermination of the entire Palestinian population.

The Socialist Equality Party demands an immediate cutoff of all US funding for the Israeli regime. Unlike the Democrats and Republicans, our party will use the 2004 election to openly oppose the US political establishment's half-century-old policy of economic and military support for Israel. The US backing for the oppression of the Palestinian people is morally indefensible and inimical to the interests of American working people and the working masses of the entire Middle East, including Israel itself.

We warn that a continuation of the present US policy threatens to produce a military conflagration in the Middle East and new terrorist atrocities against working people in the US itself, as well as internationally.

The cycle of violent repression, revenge and retribution of which Sharon is the world's most expert practitioner must be brought to a halt through the independent intervention of the working class. The only way out of the bloody crisis created by US imperialism and Zionism lies in the fight to unite Arab and Jewish workers in a common struggle against capitalism and for the building of a socialist society. This entails the tearing down of the artificial and economically irrational national boundaries that are the legacy of colonialism in the Middle East. The SEP campaign will seek to create the broadest support in the US and internationally for such a movement.

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