Slaughter in Lebanon enters fourth week

What way forward in the struggle against war?

Socialist Equality Party
2 August 2006

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As the brutal US-Israeli war against the Lebanese people enters its fourth week, there is no sign that the massacre of innocent civilians is about to end. On the contrary, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), backed by air strikes and artillery fire, are pressing deeper into Lebanon, with the apparent aim of advancing 18 miles to the Litani River, either killing or driving out the entire population between it and the Israeli border.

Israeli ground forces have also entered the Bekaa Valley, near Lebanon's border with Syria.

There is every reason to believe that the horrors of the past three weeks—the bombardments that have reduced much of south Lebanon and southern Beirut to rubble and crippled a large part of the country's infrastructure, claiming some 700 lives, wounding thousands more and turning over three quarters of a million people into refugees—is only the prelude to an even greater slaughter. The war crime that claimed the lives of more than 60 people—most of them children—in the village of Qana is to be repeated throughout the region in the coming days and weeks.

The Israeli government has already ended the so-called 48-hour bombing moratorium declared in the wake of the Qana massacre—which it largely ignored by continuing to strike targets at will—proceeding on Wednesday morning with the resumption of a full-scale air war against Lebanon. For the first time, Israeli warplanes dropped leaflets even north of the Litani warning villagers that they too could expect to be struck by bombs and missiles if they did not flee their homes.

Witnesses in the Bekaa Valley town of Baalbek have reported that Israeli helicopter gunships bombed a hospital filled with people wounded in earlier attacks.

Israeli Trade Minister Eli Yshai, a member of the government's security cabinet, told army radio that there was little danger that the United Nations would vote on a ceasefire this week, and even if it did, Israel would ignore it.

"Israel is not obliged to stand at attention and cease its operations if the United Nations decide on a ceasefire," he declared. He said the Israeli government had no intention of accepting any ceasefire "except on our conditions," and added that "our American friends will veto in such a case," referring to Washington's power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to veto any resolution. He and other Israeli officials indicated that the war of aggression will continue for at least several more weeks.

The Israeli regime has every reason to be confident that its patron in Washington will continue to back its war against Lebanon. There is every indication that the Bush administration is not merely backing Israel, but prodding it to escalate its offensive until it achieves the stated aim of smashing the Lebanese Shiite Hezbollah movement.

What has shocked world opinion even more than the savage character of Israel's military offensive is the shameless and unqualified support Washington has provided for a war that has inflicted 30 Lebanese civilian casualties for every one suffered by Israel, and has set Lebanon as country back by decades.

Even prominent former officials of the Bush administration, such as Richard Armitage, the former deputy secretary of state, and Richard Haass, the State Department's head of policy and planning during Bush's first term, have expressed dismay at the administration's failure to maintain even a pretense of even-handed diplomacy.

Again and again, Bush and other top US officials have declared their opposition to an immediate ceasefire in Lebanon, calling instead for a "sustainable peace." This means that an end to hostilities is acceptable only on the basis of the US and Israel achieving their war aims in full. Similar "ceasefires" were imposed by the Third Reich in Poland, France and elsewhere in the 1930s and 1940s.

It is by now clear to all but the willfully blind that Hezbollah's capture of two Israeli soldiers July 12 was not the cause of the present war, but merely the pretext for launching a long-planned aggression. Nor was this war simply determined by the government of Israel, with Washington providing its blessing after the fact. On the contrary, it represents an extension and deepening of the US imperialist intervention in the Middle East launched with the invasion of Iraq more than three years ago.

The aims of this war are not merely to secure Israel against Hezbollah, but to further US strategic goals in Central Asia and the Middle East, using the so-called "global war on terrorism" as the justification for a predatory policy directed at establishing Washington's stranglehold over the oil reserves concentrated in the region. This, in turn, is seen as critical to US imperialism's goal of achieving global hegemony.

With the Bush administration's unqualified support for the war against Lebanon, US imperialism has dropped the democratic and pacifist pretensions with which it has historically cloaked its real objectives. War and the slaughter of innocent civilians are once again being legitimized as tools of foreign policy.

All of the talk of Bush and Cheney about "preemptive war" and "the new wars of the twenty-first century" now can be seen in their true light. The invasion of Iraq was only the beginning of a far broader utilization of military violence and terror to secure the global interests of America's corporate and financial elite.

US support for the Israeli war against Lebanon is merely a stepping stone for future military campaigns aimed at bringing about "regime change" in Syria and Iran. Washington intends to allow no regime that poses even a potential challenge to its global ambitions to remain in power.

In the wake of the Second World War and the horrific crimes carried out by fascism and imperialism in Europe and Asia, the world's powers

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formally foreswore military aggression as a means of furthering national interests. The United Nations was established, declaring in its founding charter that it would "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind," and vowing that "armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest."

These lofty words are now a dead letter. War has once again been legitimized by the world's premier power as an acceptable means of achieving political aims. The slaughter of innocent children is to be duly regretted in hypocritical statements to the press, but dismissed in practice as mere "collateral damage," an inevitable and acceptable price to be paid for the realization of strategic objectives.

In a very real sense the historic clock has been turned back. The methods of international lawlessness, aggression and militarism that dominated world affairs during the 1930s, in the run-up to the Second World War, have been revived with a vengeance.

This is not merely a matter of Bush, Cheney and a cabal of "neoconservatives" imposing some deviant and reactionary policy upon the US government. The Democrats, the ostensible party of opposition, have attempted to outdo the administration in their support for Israel's war, in some cases criticizing the administration from the right. Politicians such as Senator Hillary Clinton of New York declare their unconditional support for Israel's "right of self-defense," explicitly endorsing any and all actions by the Zionist regime, even as it is slaughtering women and children.

There is a no significant opposition within the American political establishment. Within the media, support for the continuation of the war is nearly unanimous. The *Wall Street Journal*, reflecting the views of US finance capital and the Bush administration, declared Tuesday: "We hope that, while [Secretary of State] Rice pursues diplomatic options, privately Mr. Bush is telling [Israeli Prime Minister] Olmert that Israel must finish the job he started against Hezbollah—including a ground invasion of southern Lebanon if that's what it takes." It added only that Israel must demonstrate "the will to prevail as rapidly as militarily possible."

The *Washington Post*, just days after the Qana massacre, lamented the "predictable focus by media outlets around the world on Israel's mistakes and excesses," and urged a continuation of a war until victory. "The trick is determining how much of this should be left to Israel's ongoing military campaign, how much to the international force the United Nations will be asked to authorize for Lebanon," the *Post* editorial stated.

It continued by giving voice to the wider objectives of the Lebanon war: "In the coming weeks both the Iranian and Syrian governments need to hear a consistent message: A decision to cooperate in stabilizing the Middle East, from Iraq to Lebanon and Gaza, will ease their present isolation. But attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction or wage proxy war through groups such as Hezbollah will be answered with strength, not appeasement."

In other words, submit to US-Israeli diktat or face the same fate as Lebanon.

The major international institutions have proven absolutely impotent in opposing the US-Israeli war drive. The United Nations resembles nothing so much as the League of Nations, to which Ethiopia's Haile Selassie appealed in vain when his country was overrun by Italian fascism in the 1930s.

The European Union confirmed the spinelessness of the European bourgeoisie when it failed Tuesday to pass a resolution demanding a ceasefire in Lebanon, instead bowing to Bush's principal ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, in opting to call for a "cessation of hostilities," an ambiguous formulation meant to give the Israeli military weeks more to conduct its scorched-earth campaign.

The events in Lebanon have the most ominous implications for working people not only in the Middle East, but in the United States and internationally.

How long will it be before the draft is reinstated in the US and young people are dragooned into the army to fight Washington's ever-widening wars of aggression abroad?

How long will it be before nuclear weapons are used against one of Washington's chosen enemies—an option already proposed within the administration in relation to Iran's nuclear program—raising the specter of a real-life Armageddon?

And how long will it be before the militarization of US society leads to the outright suspension of democratic rights, the jailing of political opponents, and the use of martial law powers against the American people?

Every day there are new indications that such a shift in the methods of rule by America's corporate and financial elite is approaching. The mood within the US government found noxious expression at a White House press conference last Friday. Responding to an unusually aggressive question from a reporter who asked why US influence was waning in the Middle East, Bush said it was the fault of the "terrorists," adding, "They kill innocent people to achieve their objectives... They get on TV screens and they get people to ask questions about, well, this, that or the other."

The clear implication was that any journalist who questions the policies of the administration in the Middle East is an accomplice of terrorism. The logical conclusion is that they should be jailed and their publications shut down.

This follows the revelation that the Bush administration is promoting legislation that would extend the methods of Guantánamo—indefinite detention and trials by drumhead military commissions—to American citizens as well as "enemy combatants."

If the tragedies that befell humanity in the 1930s—global war and fascism—are not to be repeated on an even more horrific scale, the working class must advance its own alternative. It is not enough to feel revulsion for the killing that is being carried out every day in Iraq and Lebanon and the lies that are told to justify it. Neither is it enough to protest these crimes. A new political force must be created that can put a stop to them.

This can be accomplished only through the building of new political movement of the working class, independent of the existing big business parties and based on the perspective of uniting working people internationally—including the Arab and Jewish workers of the Middle East—in a common struggle for the socialist transformation of society.

This is the fundamental objective of the campaign being waged by the Socialist Equality Party in the United States in the November midterm elections. Our candidates are running to give voice to the deep-rooted opposition that exists within the working class to the policies of war, social inequality and political reaction that characterize both the Democratic and Republican parties.

We urge all those who oppose the bloodbaths in Iraq and Lebanon and want to take action to bring them to a halt to study the program of the Socialist Equality Party, participate in the campaign to place our candidates on the ballot, and join with our party in the fight to build a new revolutionary leadership in the working class.

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