

War now, peace later: Israel's doves line up behind war

Part two

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This is the concluding part of a two-part article on the attitude of Israel's Peace Now movement towards the Olmert government's wars of aggression in Lebanon and Gaza. The first part was posted August 11.

The support of Peace Now and other liberal pacifist groups for Zionist expansionism flows inexorably from their acceptance of the legitimacy of a capitalist state based upon the forced removal of the Palestinians and the religious and ethnic dominance of Jews over non-Jews.

The peace movement developed after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in 1977. It opposed the expansion of Zionist settlements in the territories seized in the 1967 war and denounced the 1978 invasion of Lebanon by Israel's first-ever Likud government, under Menachem Beigin. But Peace Now's leadership and the perspective that it advanced did not simply articulate the desire of the Israeli people to reach an agreement on the long-standing conflict with the Palestinians and Israel's Arab neighbours.

It expressed a political tendency within the Zionist elite whose primary concern was the long-term security and survival of the Israeli state. Peace Now argued that a smaller Israel at peace with its neighbours was preferable to a Greater Israel permanently at war. Any other policy would create "doubts as to the justice of our cause," it stated.

Above all, the long-term survival of Israel demanded the continued identification of the working class with the bourgeois state, an identification that was threatened by mounting domestic opposition to Israel's subjugation of the Palestinians and the Lebanese. "The real strength of the Israeli army grows out of the citizenry-soldiers' identification with state policy," Peace Now argued.

The movement's leaders advanced a nationalist solution to the conflict: the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. In essence, Palestinian, not Israeli, forces would police the borders on Israel's behalf.

In 1992, the Meretz party—in effect, Peace Now's political wing—proposed that the borders of the Palestinian state be decided in line with Israel's security needs, not according to the borders that existed prior to the 1967 war, while an undivided Jerusalem would be Israel's capital.

The logic of the two-state solution was that each state would be

ethnically homogeneous: as few Palestinians as possible would remain in Israel, and as few Israelis as possible would be subject to Palestinian rule. There would be a cross-border movement of goods, largely from Israel to Palestine, but not of people.

Palestinian workers, whom Meretz saw as a threat to Israel's security as well as to Israeli workers' wages, would generally be prevented from working in Israel, and the borders would be strictly policed to prevent "illegal crossings." The party's platform said, "A clear separation between the two populations is desirable both from a security standpoint and as a way of perpetuating Israeli-Palestinian peace."

By focusing on "land for peace," Peace Now ignored the economic and social conditions faced by much of Israel's population, particularly the Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent (the Sephardi Jews) and the Arab Israelis, who had the worst jobs and housing.

Despite the fact that the settlements had cost billions of taxpayers' dollars, Peace Now made little attempt to explain that the deteriorating social conditions that Israeli workers faced were the direct result of the settler policy. This was no accident. Its leaders were determined to avoid any action that would result in class confrontations in Israel. Their propaganda was geared to winning the backing of sections of the Israeli ruling class that sought some accommodation with the Palestinians in order to better pursue an agenda of becoming the economic powerhouse of the Middle East.

Consequently, Israel's peace movement was organically incapable of advancing a perspective that articulated the legitimate democratic and social aspirations of both Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens and the Palestinians living outside Israel's borders.

Its commitment to peace was subordinate to its concern for the preservation of Israel and its economic needs. To a considerable extent, its differences with the right wing were tactical, concerning the best means to secure Israel's national interests.

In the end, Peace Now's programme became the official policy of the Israeli bourgeoisie. The Labour government famously signed the Oslo agreement on the White House lawn in 1993. Even subsequent Likud governments under Benjamin Netanyahu and later, after a short-lived Labour government, under Ariel Sharon, as well as the present Kadima-led coalition, adhered to the notion of a Palestinian entity, albeit one whose borders will be determined

unilaterally by Israel.

The subsequent Oslo negotiations were continually frustrated by the need to placate the right-wing Zionists, for whom any surrender of the settlements was anathema and whose demands became ever more strident.

As the borders of the Palestinian state on offer shrank, so did the Palestinian Authority's control over its own resources. At the same time, the separation between Israel and the putative state brought upon the Palestinians ever-increasing economic hardship, social deprivation and political oppression, while a handful of Palestinian families amassed stupendous fortunes.

Nothing that Israel could or would concede offered any prospect of alleviating the suffering of the Palestinians. Thus, in September 2000, Sharon's provocation at Temple Mount/Haram A-Sharif ignited a social tinderbox that Yasser Arafat was unable to control.

Caught out by the bitter logic of its own agenda, Peace Now disintegrated. Its vote collapsed, and little was heard from its leaders. Most of them uncritically echoed the right wing in blaming Arafat for the collapse of the negotiations and became indistinguishable from the Labour Party and the more right-wing parties.

Amos Oz proclaimed that the Jews and Palestinians "cannot live together as one happy family because they are not one. The only thing to do is to mark a partition somewhere across the country roughly in accordance with the demographic realities." He thereby prefigured Sharon's infamous security wall and Sharon's policy of unilateral separation.

Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin, the architects of Oslo, also welcomed and supported Sharon's unilateral dismantling of the settlements and the military installations in Gaza, enabling the imperialist powers and their servile media to lionise this arch-criminal as a man of peace. Not one leading proponent of Peace Now denounced this characterisation as a fraud.

The bankruptcy of Peace Now is rooted in their acceptance of the *sine qua non* of Zionism—that Jews and Arabs cannot live together. The Zionists established a state based upon ethnic cleansing of close to a million Palestinians and systematic discrimination against those who stayed.

Israeli Arabs, who make up 20 percent of the population, suffer much higher unemployment, are twice as likely to be poor, have the lowest-paid jobs and are denied benefits for housing, rent or mortgages. Non-Jewish people are essentially barred from owning land, so that no Arab town has been built since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Similarly, they have more limited access to education, health and other welfare facilities than Israeli Jews.

Peace Now accepts the capitalist organisation of society based on the domination of a handful of families that control the Tel Aviv stock market, a system that has produced an ever-widening gap between rich and poor.

This acceptance of Zionism made the peace movement incapable of challenging the more aggressive Zionist perspective that came to dominate under Sharon's leadership. Both Zionist tendencies recognised that the prospect of the Palestinians becoming a majority in a state whose citizenship is based upon religious identity constituted an "existential threat." Hence, the peace camp

joined forces with the most right-wing government Israel had up to then known.

Nearly 60 years after Israel's founding, the reactionary Zionist utopia of a national state in which the Jews of the world could find sanctuary has been realised in the form of a capitalist state created through the dispossession of another people and maintained through war, repression and social inequality. All wings of the Zionist bourgeoisie have now united behind this enterprise.

Israel's role as a subcontractor for US imperialism means ever-greater military expenditure and attacks on its neighbours, threatening ever-greater political instability.

The way forward for Israelis seeking to oppose the war entails first and foremost a recognition that support for Zionism is incompatible with such a struggle.

The dead end into which Zionism has led Jewish workers is an expression of the failure of all movements based upon a nationalist perspective to resolve any of the fundamental questions confronting working people. This is no less true for the Arab countries, where ruling cliques have manipulated nationalist sentiments and bitter resentment of Israel in order to divert the social struggles of the working class.

Historical experience has demonstrated again and again—in the Balkans, Ireland, Africa and the Middle East itself—that ethnic, national and religious antagonisms cannot be overcome through agreements imposed under a capitalist framework. Such divisions can be overcome only by uniting all of the oppressed, Arab and Jewish alike, under the leadership of the working class in a struggle against imperialist domination and the profit system.

Only a struggle for socialism—for a United Socialist States of the Middle East—can open the way for a genuine democratic development, based upon the removal of the artificial borders imposed on the region after World War I that divide the peoples and economies of the region, and the rational and humane mobilisation of the vast natural and human resources of the region in the interests of the whole population.

Only in this way can the region liberate itself from wars and oppression fuelled by the profit drive of foreign capitalists and the native ruling classes. This means above all establishing the political independence of Arab and Jewish workers from all of the representatives of bourgeois rule.

Concluded



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