

Netanyahu's judicial coup and the dead end of Zionism

Jean Shaoul, Chris Marsden
26 July 2023

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government passed legislation Monday giving itself untrammelled power, in the face of mass popular opposition unprecedented in Israel's history.

The new law ends the Supreme Court's power to strike down the decisions of elected officials on the grounds of "unreasonableness," granting the Knesset the power to overturn the Court's ruling with a simple majority. At a stroke, this removes any separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary.

From now on the government can politicize the selection of judges, appoint convicted criminals to the highest offices of the state and allow Netanyahu, currently on trial on corruption charges that could put him behind bars for years, to evade conviction.

In the Supreme Court, Netanyahu is targeting an institution that has repeatedly colluded in the brutal suppression of the Palestinians, shielded settler violence and presided over the 2018 Nation State Law defining Israel as "the national home of the Jewish people" and confirming its Arab population as second-class citizens.

Even this is not enough for Netanyahu's government of ultra-nationalists and religious Zionists. Their aims are the total annexation of the Occupied West Bank, ethnic cleansing throughout Israel and the imposition of authoritarian rule over a society characterized by acute social inequality, stepped up militarism and cultural reaction.

The prospect of such measures has sparked an existential crisis for the State of Israel, igniting seven months of demonstrations, mobilizing hundreds of thousands of people amid scenes of vicious police attacks on demonstrators. Speaking on Britain's Channel 4 television, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert now warns, "This is a serious threat. It's never happened before, and we are going into a civil war now."

A striking feature of the oppositional wave is the announcement by more than 10,000 army reservists that they will refuse to serve if the judicial coup goes ahead, saying they are unwilling to continue risking their lives for a government that is no longer democratic.

The army demands several years of military service for young Jewish Israelis and annual reservist duty. For 56 years, military service has meant enforcing Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian and Syrian land, carrying out search and arrest raids, forced evictions, demolitions and other punitive measures as well as providing cover for settlers carrying out vigilante attacks.

The reservists' refusal to serve reflects growing concern among workers and professional middle-class layers over the far-right and extremist settlers' efforts to provoke an all-out war against the Palestinians, even as Netanyahu steps up the covert war against Iran and its allies in Syria and Lebanon. It takes place under conditions where Israel is a social and political powder keg and the entire Middle

East has been destabilised by the deepening global economic crisis, the pandemic, climate change and US-led plans to escalate the war against Russia in Ukraine and its regional allies, Iran and Syria, with Tel Aviv as its chief attack dog. This prompted IDF Chief of Staff Herzi Halevi to warn that without "a strong and united defence force," Israel would "no longer be able to exist as a country in the region."

These are the concerns animating the self-proclaimed leaders of the opposition to Netanyahu's judicial coup—former ministers, generals and security and intelligence chiefs. The opposition leaders are no less committed to the expansion of Israel's borders at the expense of the Palestinians, but they fear the turn to open dictatorship will jeopardise the interests of Israel's corporate and financial elite and have begged Netanyahu to "compromise."

Israel has long depended for its survival on massive economic and military support from the United States, particularly after its success against the Arab armies in 1967, in return for acting as US imperialism's policeman in the Middle East. Now, instead of being an effective policeman, Netanyahu's actions have undermined Washington's protracted efforts to secure alliances with Arab regimes in the Middle East, threatening its plans to isolate and crush Iran and exposing the fraud of its claim to be upholding democracy in waging its de facto war against Russia in Ukraine.

In addition, the prospect of protracted social upheaval in Israel and throughout the region has spooked international investors, with Morgan Stanley cutting its sovereign credit to a "dislike stance" and credit rating agency Moody's warning of "negative consequences" and "significant risk" for Israel's economy and security.

The vast outpouring of opposition to the government has, crucially, politically discredited the fraudulent claims of those equating criticism of Israel with antisemitism. This has undermined a global witch-hunt of the left to silence and discredit opponents of Israel's repression of the Palestinians and the broader war aims of the state's imperialist backers.

It has at the same time refuted the central tenet of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Campaign blaming all Israelis for the crimes of their government. Citing the pro-Zionist leadership of the protest movement, numerous pseudo-left and liberal publications have insisted that all that is happening is a fall-out between rival Zionist cliques and that Jewish workers can never be won to united struggle with the Palestinians because they are loyal to the "settler colonial state" which provides them with a supposedly privileged existence.

There are complex problems in developing a genuine socialist opposition to Netanyahu's fascistic agenda. But the working class—Israeli and Palestinian, Jewish, secular, Muslim and Christian—is being objectively driven into struggle against the ruling class and its

state apparatus.

What is necessary is for the working class and its younger generation to draw the central political lessons of the history of Israel since its foundation.

The central myths of the Zionist project have been dealt a body blow from which they will never recover. Nothing is left of the insistence on “national unity” on which Zionism rests. The claim that its establishment 75 years ago through the forcible expulsion of the Palestinians would provide a democratic haven for the Jewish people after the horrors of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust has turned into a nightmare.

Zionism emerged as a right-wing ethno-nationalist movement in the 19th century based on exclusivist conceptions of racial, religious and linguistic separatism to justify the establishment of a Jewish capitalist state. The growth of its influence among a people deeply rooted in the Enlightenment and then the socialist movement was due to the catastrophe that overtook European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s, culminating in the extermination of 6 million European Jews in the Nazi Holocaust. This defeat of the European working class by fascism was facilitated by the Stalinist degeneration of the Soviet Union and the Communist International, and the Soviet bureaucracy’s betrayal of the struggle for world socialism.

Zionism politically exploited the widespread political disillusionment among Jews to urge the creation of a Jewish state through emigration to British-controlled Palestine. Israel was established in 1948 through the forcible and brutal expulsion of almost a million Palestinians and the seizure of their land.

A state founded on this basis and the ongoing repression of the Palestinians was always incapable of developing a genuinely democratic society. Its evolution as a garrison state for US imperialism, repeatedly at war with its Arab neighbours and in perpetual war with the Palestinians; pursuing an expansionist “Greater Israel” policy; resting ever more firmly on the right-wing settler population in the Occupied Territories and US military subventions to offset the destabilising impact of acute levels of social inequality among the highest in the world, is what has paved the way for the Frankenstein monster of Netanyahu’s government.

The conditions have now emerged for a successful struggle to win the entire working class, Jewish and Palestinian, to a unified socialist struggle against their common oppressor. This perspective has been fought for solely by the Fourth International, represented today by the International Committee.

At the outset of the ongoing wave of protests the *World Socialist Web Site* drew attention to the prescient response by the Fourth International to the partition of Palestine in 1947 by the United Nations that led to the creation of Israel, in a statement, “Against the Stream.” This warned:

The Fourth International rejects as utopian and reactionary the “Zionist solution” of the Jewish question. It declares that total renunciation of Zionism is the sine qua non condition for the merging of Jewish workers’ struggles with the social, national and liberationist struggles of the Arab toilers...

By partition a wedge is driven between the Arab and Jewish worker. The Zionist state with its provocative lines of demarcation will bring about the blossoming forth of irredentist (revenge) movements on either side. There will be fighting for an “Arab Palestine” and for a “Jewish state”

within the historic frontiers of Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel). As a result, the chauvinistic atmosphere thus created will poison the Arab world in the Middle East and throttle the anti-imperialist fight of the masses, while Zionists and Arab feudalists will vie for imperialist favours.

The WSWS explained:

The dead-end of Zionism is only one manifestation of the failure of all national movements and the states they have created to resolve any of the fundamental questions confronting the mass of working people. The same issues are posed to all the peoples of the region, where the working class is subject to brutally repressive forms of bourgeois rule amid grotesque levels of social inequality.

Nor is there anything unique in the eruption of opposition. Israel is a significant expression of the far-reaching political consequences of a global upsurge of the working class, from Sri Lanka to France.

As elsewhere, the turn by Israel’s ruling elite toward dictatorship is rooted fundamentally in the extreme growth of social inequality and the escalation of war that are the twin products of capitalism in its death agony. It will be halted not through the “negotiations” between rival capitalist factions, but by developing the expanding class struggle throughout the world into a conscious political movement for socialism.

The critical task facing workers and youth is the building of independent revolutionary parties, sections of the ICFI, including an Israeli-Palestinian section, to provide the political leadership to overthrow the Zionist state and the Arab bourgeois regimes and build a United Socialist States of the Middle East.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact