

Report to London meeting on the centenary of Trotskyism

Genocide in Gaza: Imperialism descends into the abyss

David North
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The following remarks were delivered by David North, chairperson of the International Editorial Board of the World Socialist Web Site, to a meeting at Birkbeck, University of London on Saturday as part of an international series of lectures on Leon Trotsky and the Struggle for Socialism in the Twenty-First Century. This lecture relates the foundational principles of the International Committee of the Fourth International to the present struggle against the imperialist-Zionist genocide in Gaza.

The Open Letter and the origins of the International Committee

Seventy years ago this week, on November 16, 1953, a “Letter to Trotskyists Throughout the World” was published in *The Militant*, newspaper of the Socialist Workers Party, which was then the Trotskyist organization in the United States. Issued in the name of the party’s National Committee, its author was James P. Cannon, the SWP’s 63-year-old national chairman.

The Socialist Workers Party was not formally affiliated with the Fourth International due to anti-communist laws in the United States. Despite this technical limitation, Cannon’s political authority was based on the critical role he had played in the founding of the International Left Opposition in 1928, his subsequent close collaboration with Trotsky in the fight for the Fourth International and the preparation of its founding congress in September 1938, his central role in the struggle led by Trotsky against the petty-bourgeois revisionist tendency of Max Shachtman, James Burnham and Martin Abern in 1939-40, and, in the aftermath of Trotsky’s assassination in August 1940, his unyielding defense, in the reactionary environment of World War II and the initial years of the Cold War, of the programmatic heritage of the Fourth International.

But in 1953, Cannon confronted a powerful revisionist tendency in the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, represented by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, which proposed the repudiation of the essential programmatic foundations of the Trotskyist movement. The central elements of Pablo’s revisionism were the rejection of Trotsky’s insistence on the counterrevolutionary nature of Stalinism and the perspective of building the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution. Pablo and his acolyte, Mandel, advocated the liquidation of the sections of the Fourth International into the mass Stalinist parties, or, depending on the balance of forces in a given country, into the social democratic, bourgeois nationalist and petty-bourgeois radical movements.

Within the United States, the followers of Pablo advanced this liquidationist program under the banner, “Junk the Old Trotskyism.” They

derided Cannon and the veteran leadership of the SWP as “museum pieces” whose defense of “orthodox Trotskyism” was politically irrelevant. Pablo was not engaged merely in a war of words. He utilized his position in the International Secretariat to organize anti-Trotskyist factions in the Fourth International and to expel individuals and even entire sections that opposed his drive to liquidate the Fourth International as an independent revolutionary movement.

The political conception that underlay Pablo’s war against the Fourth International was his conception that Stalinism, contrary to the analysis of Trotsky, remained a powerful revolutionary force. Responding to the pressure of the masses, and under conditions of a global nuclear war, the Stalinists would be compelled to take power. The outcome of this process would be the creation of “deformed workers’ states” that would, after a period of several centuries, somehow evolve into socialist societies.

That this bizarre perspective attracted a substantial following testified not only to the political disorientation that developed within the Fourth International in the aftermath of World War II, but also to the growing influence of an increasingly affluent and politically self-conscious petty-bourgeoisie engaged in radical left politics.

The foundational principles of the ICFI

Cannon’s issuing of what came to be known as the “Open Letter” was a critical political initiative in defense of the Fourth International. Drawing upon his immense political experience, Cannon concisely summarized the foundational principles of the Trotskyist movement. He wrote:

1. The death agony of the capitalist system threatens the destruction of civilization through worsening depressions, world wars and barbaric manifestations like fascism. The development of atomic weapons today underlines the danger in the gravest possible way.
2. The descent into the abyss can be avoided only by replacing capitalism with the planned economy of socialism on a world scale and thus resuming the spiral of progress opened up by capitalism in its early days.
3. This can be accomplished only under the leadership of the working class as the only truly revolutionary class in society. But the working class itself faces a crisis of leadership although the world relationship of social forces was never so favorable as today for the workers to take the road to power.

4. To organize itself for carrying out this world-historic aim the working class in each country must construct a revolutionary socialist party in the pattern developed by Lenin; that is, a combat party capable of dialectically combining democracy and centralism—democracy in arriving at decisions, centralism in carrying them out; a leadership controlled by the ranks, ranks able to carry forward under fire in disciplined fashion.

5. The main obstacle to this is Stalinism, which attracts workers through exploiting the prestige of the October 1917 Revolution in Russia, only later, as it betrays their confidence, to hurl them either into the arms of the Social Democracy, into apathy, or back into illusions in capitalism. The penalty for these betrayals is paid by the working people in the form of consolidation of fascist or monarchist forces, and new outbreaks of wars fostered and prepared by capitalism. From its inception, the Fourth International set as one of its major tasks the revolutionary overthrow of Stalinism inside and outside the USSR.

6. The need for flexible tactics facing many sections of the Fourth International, and parties or groups sympathetic to its program, makes it all the more imperative that they know how to fight imperialism and all of its petty-bourgeois agencies (such as nationalist formations or trade union bureaucracies) without capitulation to Stalinism; and, conversely, know how to fight Stalinism (which in the final analysis is a petty-bourgeois agency of imperialism) without capitulating to imperialism.

These fundamental principles established by Leon Trotsky retain full validity in the increasingly complex and fluid politics of the world today. In fact the revolutionary situations opening up on every hand as Trotsky foresaw have only now brought full concreteness to what at one time may have appeared to be somewhat remote abstractions not intimately bound up with the living reality of the time. The truth is that these principles now hold with increasing force both in political analysis and in the determination of the course of practical action.

Seventy years after its publication, the Open Letter retains undiminished relevance as a summation of the present political situation and the tasks of the Fourth International, led by the International Committee. Cannon's warning of the use of nuclear weapons and the danger of fascist barbarism is even more timely today than it was in 1953.

The one major change that stands out is that the Soviet Union no longer exists, and the mass Stalinist parties have been swept away. Of course, to the extent that the reactionary class collaborationist, nationalist and anti-socialist politics of Stalinism persist in new political guises, the obstacle that it represented to the revolutionary movement of the working class has not disappeared.

The working class still confronts the systematic and organized treachery of the trade union bureaucracies, the reactionary organizations that still label themselves Labor, social democratic and "Green," and the innumerable pseudo-left and bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalist parties and organizations—many of which trace their origins to the Pabloite repudiation of the program of the Fourth International. The crisis of revolutionary leadership remains to be resolved.

But absolutely nothing remains of the false and politically disorienting identification of Stalinism with the heritage and program of the October Revolution. The breakdown of the mass Stalinist movement has vindicated the struggle initiated by Trotsky a century ago with the founding of the Left Opposition and substantiated the world revolutionary political perspective of the International Committee of the Fourth International. These are political facts of immense significance in the present international crisis of the world capitalist system.

Descent into the abyss: The Gaza genocide

We are meeting today amidst the unfolding genocide in Gaza. This is the realization of "the descent into the abyss" of which the Open Letter warned. Capitalism, as Marx wrote, emerged historically "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt." And so it will end.

Billions of people throughout the world are outraged by the daily images of the atrocities being committed by the Israeli regime, with the full support of all the imperialist powers. All the hypocritical invocations of "human rights" employed by the United States and its NATO allies to justify its wars—usually described as "humanitarian interventions"—have been totally exposed and discredited.

Every single imperialist leader—Biden in the United States, Trudeau in Canada, Sunak in Britain, Macron in France, Scholz in Germany, Meloni in Italy—are fully implicated as the accomplices of Netanyahu in mass murder. Were war crimes trials to be held, they would not be able to claim, as some of the Nazi ringleaders ludicrously attempted at Nürnberg, that they were not aware of the atrocities being committed by the Israeli Zionist regime. Not only are they aware of these crimes, they have justified and even welcomed them.

As of November 16, the death of 11,500 people in Gaza had been confirmed, including at least 4,710 children. The rate at which Palestinian children are now being killed is orders of magnitude higher than any other conflict in the 21st century. In addition, more than 29,800 Palestinians have been injured. Deprived of communications facilities, the Gaza Health Ministry has stopped counting the number of dead and injured. Since October 7, Israeli attacks have murdered, on average, 320 Gazans every day. If that rate has continued through today, the number of dead is likely to be above 13,000. Of this total, more than half are women and children. The carpet bombing of Gaza has destroyed or damaged 40 percent of northern Gaza's homes and shattered its healthcare, food distribution and water treatment systems, clearly war crimes under international law. And while the violence of the Israeli military machine has been directed mainly against the people of Gaza, the army and fascist settlers have murdered approximately 175 Palestinians on the West Bank.

Of the genocidal character of the Israeli onslaught there is no question. It is confirmed by the explicit statements of Israeli leaders. National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir has stated that anyone who supports Hamas should be "eliminated." Amihai Eliyahu, a coalition partner of Netanyahu and Israel's heritage minister, said that dropping a nuclear bomb on Gaza should be an option. Galit Distel Atbaryan, until recently Israel's information minister, demanded the erasure of "all of Gaza from the face of the earth" and forcing its people into exile in Egypt.

At the end of October, Craig Mokhiber stated, as he resigned from his post as director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights: "This is a textbook case of genocide. The European, ethno-nationalist, settler colonial project of Palestine has entered its final phase, toward the expedited destruction of the last remnants of indigenous Palestinian life in Palestine. What's more, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom and much of Europe are wholly complicit in this horrific assault." Volker Turk, the United Nations commissioner for human rights, stated in Geneva, "There has been a breakdown of the most basic respect for humane values. The killing of so many civilians cannot be dismissed as collateral damage."

The raid on al-Shifa Hospital, which the Netanyahu regime had claimed would expose its use by Hamas as a center of military operations, has only yielded further evidence of Israel's crimes against humanity.

The war cry of imperialism: “No ceasefire”

In the face of irrefutable daily visual evidence of unrestrained violence against the civilian population, the imperialist powers have repeatedly and emphatically opposed calls for a ceasefire. “No ceasefire” has become the homicidal war cry of the allies of the Israeli regime. In its place, the experts in euphemisms of the United States government and its NATO allies have invented the phrase “humanitarian pause”—a remarkable way of describing the reloading of weapons and the recalibrating of targets by the Israeli military forces.

The Israeli government and its imperialist backers justify the genocidal rampage as a legitimate response to the raid launched by Hamas on October 7. Let us first of all point out that there has been no formal investigation into the events of that day. There is no exact count of the number of deaths, let alone how the victims lost their lives. There is no reliable information on how many Israeli victims died at the hands of Hamas and how many died as a consequence of the massive retaliation of the Israeli military. Moreover, among the unanswered questions are those related to the extent that the Netanyahu government, looking for a pretext for an attack on Gaza, deliberately overlooked intelligence information indicating that some sort of operation was being planned by Hamas. While it is certainly possible that the Netanyahu regime did not anticipate the scale of the incursion into Israel, it is hard to believe that Israel’s intelligence agencies, whose agents operate throughout Gaza and the West Bank, were entirely oblivious of Hamas’ preparation for a major military operation.

More information will surely emerge. But the Israeli regime’s attempt to justify its present actions as an appropriate response to what occurred on October 7 is fundamentally deceitful and, to be blunt, largely beside the point. Its attempt to justify its assault on Gaza as legitimate retaliation for the attack launched by Hamas is nothing other than the arguments employed throughout history by oppressors to justify their crushing of the resistance of the oppressed.

If I may be permitted to cite from a lecture that I gave last month at the University of Michigan:

The death of so many innocent people is a tragic event. But the tragedy is rooted in objective historical events and political conditions that made such an event inevitable. As always, the ruling classes oppose all references to the causes of the uprising. Their own massacres and the entire bloody system of oppression over which they preside so ruthlessly must go unmentioned.

Why should anyone be surprised that decades of oppression by the Zionist regime led to an explosive eruption of anger? It has happened in the past, and, as long as human beings are oppressed and brutalized, it will happen in the future. Those who suffer oppression cannot be expected during a desperate rebellion, when their own lives hang precariously in the balance, to treat their tormentors with tender-hearted courtesy. Such rebellions are often marked by acts of cruel and bloody vengeance.

Many examples come to mind: the Sepoy mutiny in India, the uprising of the Dakota Indians against the settlers, the rebellion of Boxers in China, of the Hereros in Southwest Africa, and, in more recent times, the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. In all these cases, the insurgents were denounced as heartless murderers and demons, and subjected to brutal retribution. Decades, if not a century or more, had to pass before they were belatedly honored as freedom fighters.

Terrorist incidents as a pretext for war and repression

As for the calculated use of a terrorist incident as a pretext for the realization of a government’s political objectives, a number of examples come to mind. In 1914, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy exploited the opportunity provided by the assassination in Sarajevo of its archduke to issue an unacceptable ultimatum to Serbia and then go to war.

In November 1938, a 17-year-old Polish-born refugee living in Paris by the name of Herschel Grynszpan assassinated Ernst Von Rath, a member of the German diplomatic corps. He carried out this act to protest the brutal anti-Jewish policies of the Nazi regime. The Nazis seized upon the desperate act of this young man to launch a violent anti-Jewish pogrom throughout Germany known as “Kristallnacht.” Over 100 Jews were murdered and 30,000 were seized and sent to concentration camps. Nearly 300 synagogues were destroyed, and thousands of Jewish-owned businesses were looted.

Many other incidents could be cited, such as the attempted assassination in London on June 3, 1982 of the Israeli ambassador to Britain, Shlomo Argov. The Israeli government used this event as a pretext to launch a large-scale invasion of Lebanon, which it called “Operation Peace for Galilee,” whose goal was to establish a security zone in southern Lebanon.

A consequence of this invasion was the massacre carried out in the Palestinian refugee camps known as Sabra and Shatila, located in Beirut. The massacres were carried out over a period of three days, from September 16 to 18, by Lebanese Christian fascist militia allied with Israel. The fascists were allowed by Israeli forces, who had surrounded Beirut, to enter the camps. Once inside, the fascists slaughtered—with the approval of Israeli Defense Minister and later Prime Minister Ariel Sharon—several thousand Palestinian refugees.

Finally, there is the destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, a murky event, explained as a “security lapse” caused by a “failure to connect the dots,” which was used by the Bush administration to invade Afghanistan and Iraq, vastly expand the military operations of the United States throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, adopt the Israeli practice of “targeted assassinations,” and, within the United States, create the Department of Homeland Security, increase the repressive power of the state and erode the democratic rights of Americans.

Notwithstanding the unstinting support for Israel’s invasion, amplified by a massive media propaganda campaign, the genocide has been met with a powerful international protest movement of unprecedented dimensions. Demonstrations of tens and even hundreds of thousands have been organized throughout the world.

In an attempt to discredit the protests, Israel, the governments with which it is allied and, of course, pro-Zionist organizations have denounced these demonstrations as “antisemitic.” This is a continuation and escalation of efforts over the last several decades to affix this label on all opponents of Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians.

Given the fact that people of Jewish extraction, and particularly Jewish youth, have played an exceptionally prominent role in the demonstrations—especially in the United States, which has the largest Jewish population outside of Israel—the allegation of antisemitism might seem simply absurd.

Even worse, given the fact that opposition to genocide is being identified, as a result of relentless repetition, as a manifestation of antisemitism, one can legitimately express the concern that the upshot of this reactionary misuse of the word will be the legitimization of anti-Jewish sentiment.

The origins of Zionism

The present-day political motivations behind the smear campaign are obvious. But the significance of the allegation of antisemitism extends beyond its directly pragmatic application. The attribution of antisemitism to all opponents of the Israeli state is rooted in the philosophically irrationalist and national chauvinist ideology upon which the entire Zionist project has been based since its emergence as a significant political movement in the late nineteenth century.

Having been gradually liberated in much of Western and Central Europe from the confines of the ghetto by the spread of Enlightenment thought and the political and social impact of the French Revolution, the Jewish intelligentsia and middle class associated social progress and the achievement of democratic rights with their assimilation, rather than segregation from society. They wanted their religion to be viewed as a private matter, and thus having no effect on their status as citizens with full democratic rights. A significant number of Jews increasingly identified their own striving for democratic rights as an element of—and one which was subordinate to—the broader and far more significant world historical struggle of the proletariat against the main cause of social oppression in the modern world, the capitalist system.

Moreover, the proletarian struggle for socialism was intrinsically international, and thus transcended and opposed the prioritization of any form of religious, ethnic or national identity over the universal solidarity of the working class. It is for this reason that the attitude of the socialist movement to the Zionist movement as it first emerged in the late 1880s and 1890s was one of irreconcilable hostility.

The assertion of the primacy of race over class was forcefully declared in Moses Hess's *From Rome to Jerusalem*, published in 1862. The first major figure to advance the perspective of a Jewish state in Palestine, Hess—who had played a significant role in the early socialist movement in the early 1840s, but who had been demoralized by the defeats suffered at the end of the decade—declared, in direct opposition to the perspective of Marx, “All history has been that of racial and class war. Racial wars are the primary, class wars the secondary factor.”

In *Rome to Jerusalem*, several essential elements of Zionist ideology are already present. The first, as stated in the statement that I have just quoted, is the prioritization of race over class.

The second is Hess' insistence that the national state is the essential foundation of all political life and the indispensable framework for Jewish survival and progress. “The Jewish popular masses,” he wrote, “will participate in the great historical movement of modern mankind only when it will have a Jewish homeland.”

The third essential element is the deeply demoralized and pessimistic conviction that Jews can never be assimilated in the existing European states. To believe that Jews can overcome persecution and achieve full emancipation through the struggle of the European working class for socialism was, claimed Hess, a delusion: “Why fool ourselves? The European nations have always perceived the existence of Jews in their midst as an anomaly. We shall always be strangers among nations ... The Germans hate less the Jewish religion than they hate their race ... Neither religious reform nor baptism, neither Enlightenment nor Emancipation will open the gates of social life before the Jews.”

The fourth element was the conviction that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine was only possible to the extent that it was seen to be beneficial to the interests of a major European power. For Hess, living in the Europe of the 1860s, that power was France, which was then ruled by the reactionary dictatorship of the Emperor Louis Bonaparte. France, he wrote, “will help the Jews to found colonies which may extend from Suez to Jerusalem and from the banks of the Jordan to the Mediterranean.” In the twentieth century, the Zionist movement would pursue its objectives

by offering its services to the Turkish sultan, the Russian tsar, and, somewhat later, to British and, finally, American imperialism.

Though it remained relatively unknown during his lifetime, Hess's *From Rome to Jerusalem* anticipated many of the conceptions that were to define the politics of the Zionist movement several decades later. Theodore Herzl later commented that if he had been familiar with Hess's book, it would not have been necessary for him to write his own *Der Judenstaat*, the *Jewish State*. But it must be immediately noted that Herzl was intellectually inferior to Hess in every respect, and unlike the latter, who drifted back toward involvement in the socialist movement following the establishment of the First International, was hostile to socialism and an independent class-based workers' movement.

Socialist opposition to Zionism

The *pogroms*—violent anti-Jewish riots—that erupted in the Russian Empire in 1881 and continued into 1882, with the support of the tsarist regime, had a profound effect on the political outlook of broad sections of the Jewish population. These bloody events provided an impulse for an immense increase of political activity among Jews. It was during this period that Zionism—advancing the program of Jewish immigration to Palestine—first began to attract a significant following. But a far more powerful tendency was toward involvement of Jewish youth in socialist politics. By the late 1890s, the principal manifestations of this activity were within the emerging Russian Social Democratic Labor Party and the Socialist Bund, which sought the independent political organization of Jewish workers on the basis of socialist politics.

Both socialist tendencies were hostile to the Zionist movement, emphatically rejecting its claim to represent the interests of the Jewish people. Significantly, in the political struggle between the Zionists and socialists, the sympathies of the tsarist regime were entirely with the former. It viewed the Zionists as an ally in the struggle against the increasingly dangerous influence of the socialist movement among Jewish youth. It sympathized with the aim of the Zionist project—the emigration of Jews from Russia to Palestine.

The historian Jossi Goldstein has written:

The positive attitude of the authorities to the activities of the Zionist movement had far-reaching implications. Unlike their rivals in the Socialist *Bund*, Zionist activists did not have to maintain the secrecy which would have obstructed the spread of their movement. The dynamism characteristic of the years 1898-1900 were largely a function of the legitimation granted by authorities. There thus opened up before the heads of the movement (the *Murshim*) and other organizers a wide field of activity denied to other movements. This gave Zionism a significant advantage over its rivals in the competition to attract a following among the Jewish population.^[1]

The present-day claim that anti-Zionism is antisemitism would have been dismissed as a vicious slander, and even political lunacy, at a time when thousands of Jewish workers and even substantial sections of the Jewish middle-class intelligentsia directed their political energies toward the struggle for socialism.

As Goldstein noted, “In Bund propaganda, the main stress was on the class distinctions, with Zionism representing the petite and middle bourgeoisie against the Bund, which represented the Jewish proletariat.”^[2]

The hostility of the Bund to Zionism was so deep and of such a fundamental character that at the Fourth Congress of the Bund in May 1901, “it was decided for the first time,” Goldstein wrote, “to launch a war to the death against Zionism.”^[3] Bundist publications warned that “Zionism is only a mask behind which to exploit the workers and deceive the toiling people.” The Bund called upon its members to keep away from “the hundreds of foul little creatures emerging from the rotten corpse of Zionism and crawling toward the proletariat to get it to deviate from the path of the class struggle.”^[4]

The hostility of socialists to Zionism was to a great extent shared by broad sections of the Russian intelligentsia, who, as Goldstein wrote, “attacked the Zionist movement and abhorred its ideas. Most of them desired its disappearance. The motives and the reasons for the unanimous anti-Zionist front of the Russian intelligentsia ... were rooted in the rationalism that determined the general theorizing of the intelligentsia in the early twentieth century. For many Zionism was still by way of being Utopian, bound up with yearnings for Zion and Jewish eschatological thinking outside the rational, intellectual world. Herzl and his like in Western Europe were regarded as allies of Jewish Orthodoxy rather than as the offspring of Western Enlightenment.”^[5]

The anti-Zionism of all factions of the socialist movement prevented the Zionists from making serious inroads into the working class. “From the outset,” Goldstein writes at the conclusion of his historical essay, “the Zionist movement attracted mainly members of the Jewish middle class.”^[6]

The Zionists never acquired the mass base necessary for the success of their reactionary colonization project until the catastrophe of the Holocaust placed at their disposal several hundreds of thousands of desperately persecuted and stateless people, survivors of Nazi genocide.

Zionist collaboration with the Nazis

There is no period of history—prior to the founding of Israel in 1948—that so thoroughly exposed the reactionary character of Zionism and its fraudulent claim to represent the interests of the Jewish people than its conduct during the 1930s. The extent of the political and commercial dealings of the Nazis and the Zionists has been extensively documented by historians. Many of the most important works on this subject have been written by Jewish historians, among whom the most renowned are Saul Friedlander and Tom Segev.

In the aftermath of Hitler’s accession to power, the Zionist organizations were inclined to collaborate with the Nazis, even arguing that both Nazism and Zionism were national movements whose “völkisch” principles were compatible.

Opposing mass protests or an economic boycott, Zionist representatives from Germany and Palestine met with representatives of the Third Reich and concluded on August 27, 1933 a financial agreement, known as the *Haavarah*, which, as explained by Friedlander, “allowed Jewish emigrants indirect transfer of part of their assets and facilitated export of goods from Nazi Germany to Palestine.”^[7]

Friedlander continued:

One of the main benefits the new regime hoped to reap from Haavarah was a breach in the foreign Jewish economic boycott of Germany. ... The Zionist organizations and the leadership of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine) distanced themselves from any form of mass protest or boycott to avoid creating obstacles to the new arrangements. Even before the conclusion of

the Haavarah Agreement, such “cooperation” sometimes took bizarre forms. Thus, in early 1933, Baron Leopold Itz Edler von Mildenstein, a man who a few years later was to become chief of the Jewish section of the SD (the *Sicherheitsdienst*, or security service, the SS intelligence branch headed by Reinhard Heydrich), was invited along with his wife to tour Palestine and write a series of articles for Goebbels’ *Der Angriff*. And so it was that the Mildensteins, accompanied by Kurt Tuchler, a leading member of the Berlin Zionist organization, and his wife, visited Jewish settlements in Eretz Israel. The highly positive articles, entitled “A Nazi Visits Palestine,” were duly published, and, to mark the occasion, a special medallion cast with a swastika on one side and a Star of David on the other.

On June 22, 1933, the leaders of the Zionist Organization for Germany sent a memorandum to Hitler, which declared:

Zionism believes that the rebirth of the national life of a people, which is now occurring in Germany through the emphasis on its Christian and national character, must also come about among the Jewish people. For the Jewish people, too, national origin, religion, common destiny and a sense of uniqueness must be of decisive importance to its existence. This demands the elimination of the egotistical individualism of the liberal era, and its replacement with a sense of community and collective responsibility.

Later, the apologists for the Zionists would attempt to explain away such statements and the *Haavarah* as survival measures undertaken under desperate conditions, as if the triumph of fascism justifies collaboration. In fact, the response of the Zionists to the brutal persecution of the Jews by the Nazis, and even to their murder, was determined by calculations of its effect on the prospects for Jewish emigration into Palestine. As David Ben-Gurion, the leader of the Zionist movement, infamously declared:

If I knew that it was possible to save all the [Jewish] children in Germany by transporting them to England, but only half of them by transporting them to Palestine, I would choose the second—because we face not only the reckoning of those children, but the historical reckoning of the Jewish people.^[8]

Ben-Gurion also expressed the fear, following the Kristallnacht pogrom, that the event might lead to international sympathy for the plight of the Jews, resulting in various countries relaxing their restrictions on immigration and thereby offering Jews alternatives to Palestine.

Zionism against Enlightenment: The metaphysics of nationalist irrationalism

However, the sympathy expressed by the Zionist organizations for Nazism cannot be merely explained as a manifestation of cowardice and grotesque tactical opportunism. Zionism, which emerged as an offspring of imperialist colonialism and as an enemy of socialism and a scientific conception of history and society, necessarily based itself on the most reactionary elements of nationalist politics and ideology.

In an epoch in which the driving force of social progress had become the revolutionary struggle of the international working class against capitalism and the bourgeois national state, Zionism based its program on the glorification of the national principle as the essential foundation of Jewish existence. All conceptions of history, stemming from the Enlightenment and the later socialist movements, that undermined the principle of national exclusivity—especially those which, on the basis of science and reason, viewed national identity as a historically limited and transitory phenomenon connected to a specific stage in the development of the productive forces and their relation to the world market—were thereby denounced as incompatible with Zionism, not only as a political program but also as the sole expression of Jewish identity. To deny the legitimacy of Zionism was, therefore, to deny the right of Jews to exist.

From this follows the insidious claim that opposition to Zionism, even if the opponent is a Jew, is antisemitic. In a book titled *Anti-Semitism and its Metaphysical Origins*, published in 2015 by Cambridge University Press, Professor David Patterson—Professor of History at the Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies at the University of Texas in Dallas—justifies the slander on the basis of a defense of religious myth and irrationalism. He asserts that the source of modern-day antisemitism must be traced back to the Enlightenment and, especially, the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. He writes:

The doctrines of the Enlightenment were engendered by a mode of thought that was inherently antisemitic: If it is to be true to itself, the philosophy of the Enlightenment has to be antisemitic. If human freedom lies in human autonomy, and if human autonomy lies in being self-legislating, as Kant maintains, then one realizes that nothing threatens self-legislating human autonomy more than the Commanding Voice of Mount Sinai, the Voice that undermines the modern view that Kant espouses and that the world now embraces.

Patterson continues:

Indeed, if one adopts the premise of the Enlightenment that there can be no people apart, but only a universal humanity grounded in reason, then one must necessarily assume an antisemitic position. ... Losing the fatherhood of God, we lose the brotherhood of humanity: Once God is superfluous, so is the human being superfluous. So is the Jewish state not only superfluous but dangerous. For the leftwing intellectual anti-Zionist, the modern history of thinking God out of the picture culminates in removing the Zionist state from the map.

These words do not appear in a Christian Evangelical fundamentalist paperback of the sort that are widely sold in American pharmacies. This appeared under the imprimatur of Cambridge University Press, among the most prestigious publishing houses in the world.

The onslaught against Gaza as the epicenter of imperialist barbarism

It testifies not only to the utterly reactionary character of Zionism, but to the far-advanced political, social, intellectual and moral putrefaction of a capitalist system that is rooted in the national state system. Herein lies the

broader significance of the intransigent solidarity of all imperialist powers with the Israeli state. There are, of course, pragmatic geopolitical interests that determine the support of the United States and its NATO allies for Israel's war against the Palestinian people.

But underlying this united front against the Palestinians is the recognition that their democratic aspirations, which require the dissolution of the existing Israeli state and the creation of a new bi-national federation, threaten not only the interests of imperialism in the Middle East, but the entire historically obsolete state structure of imperialist geopolitics and capitalist rule.

Neither the oppression of the Palestinian people nor, for that matter, the historic and still very real issue of antisemitism can be solved within the framework of the capitalist system and its nation state. Imperialism, in creating the Israeli state, did not solve the "Jewish problem." It exploited and took advantage of the immense tragedy of the Holocaust—one of imperialism's greatest crimes—for its own purposes.

The concentration on the war in Gaza is certainly justified by the scale of the crime being committed against its people. But the struggle to end the genocide vindicates and imparts the greatest urgency to the central perspective and *raison d'être* of the International Committee of the Fourth International: the struggle for the World Socialist Revolution. There exists no other answer to the terminal crisis of the capitalist system. Summing up the significance of the 1953 split in the Fourth International, Cannon wrote: "It is a question of the development of the international revolution and the socialist transformation of society."

Confronted with the genocide in Gaza, the war in Ukraine, the danger of escalation toward global nuclear war, the attacks on democratic rights, staggering levels of social inequality, the uncontrolled spread of the pandemic and the threat of ecological disaster, the International Committee turns to the expanding mass movement of workers and youth throughout the world and states emphatically: "The task with which you are confronted is the development of the international revolution and the socialist transformation of society."

And that is why you must join and build the sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout the world.

"The Attitude of the Jewish and the Russian Intelligentsia to Zionism in the Initial Period (1897-1904), in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 1986), p. 547-48.

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[1] "The Attitude of the Jewish and the Russian Intelligentsia to Zionism in the Initial Period (1897-1904), in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (October 1986), p. 547-48.

[2] Ibid., p. 550

[3] Ibid., p. 551

[4] Ibid., p. 550

[5] Ibid., p. 555

[6] Ibid., p. 555

[7] Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, p. 86

[8] Segev, Tom. *The Seventh Million* (p. 26). Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Kindle Edition.



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