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“Solidarity with Palestine?”

SOLIDARITY with Palestine is now *de rigueur* for leftwing groups in Britain. There are one or two exceptions, but they are few and far between. By and large, to be leftwing in Britain means supporting the Palestinian cause. It means supporting the leading Palestinian organizations, and sympathising with their allies in the region. Despite the politics, social outlook, and religious prejudice sponsored by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, the Muslim Brotherhood, and so on, most socialists now count themselves proud to travel along with Islamist parties in the battle against Israel and the Jews.

People on the left will bridle at the phrase “*and the Jews*” because they want to maintain an iron distinction between the programme of hating and killing Jews, espoused by Hamas, and their own strictly political motivation. Socialists do not hate Jews - consequently, they emphatically prefer the secularist objective of fighting Zionism. The British left is at pains to insist that it’s solidarity with Palestine has nothing to do with anti-Semitism and everything to do with fighting against the state of Israel.

Unfortunately this is not a distinction that has much currency in the Arab world where the fight against Israel is seen as a fight against the Jews. Pogroms and state-sponsored discrimination against Jews in many Arab countries resulted in the flight of hundreds of thousands of Jews to Israel, France, Britain, and the United States from the 1930s through to the 1950s. In some countries, notably Lebanon and Tunisia, governments attempted to pursue more liberal policies, but popular hostility towards Jews still resulted in

large-scale emigration. The record of governments, political leaders and clerics in Algeria, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, and Morocco is considerably worse, punctuated as it was with riots, killings, discriminatory laws, and the wholesale confiscation of Jewish property. Iran, in common with many Arab and European countries, has a similarly long tradition of pogroms, periodic massacres, and highly structured discrimination against Jews. This reality resulted in mass emigration of Iranian Jews to the United States and Israel both before and after the revolution of 1979. There are still Jewish neighbourhoods in Tehran, and also in Casablanca, and Tunis, but these communities are a shadow of their former size and complexity.

It is in this context that Holocaust denial and conspiratorial ideas concerning the role of Jewish domination, canvased by the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, continues to flourish in the Arab and Persian worlds. Of course, none of this can be laid at the door of the left in Britain or of those advocating solidarity with Palestine, but it does, inescapably, have some bearing on the nature and history of the Jewish state - Israel is, after all is said and done, a *Jewish State*, brought into existence by Zionist activists and by waves of Jewish refugees fleeing a tsunami of pogroms and mass killings.

This Jewish state began its nascent existence in 1920 with the election of the 314 members of the first Assembly of Representatives, and the formation of Haganah, the Jewish defence force. In the years between 1920 and the formal proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948, these institutions spearheaded the struggle of the Jews in Palestine with the colonial authorities, and with the traditional leaders of the country's Arab population. It was a period marked by anti-Jewish riots and killings, by huge strikes and political strife between the Arabs and the British marked by temporary alliances and cooperation between

the British and the Jews against the Arabs, and subsequently to full-scale guerrilla warfare between the British Army and Jewish terrorist groups. Throughout this period from 1920 to 1948 the issue in contention between the government of the British Mandate and the Arabs on the one side, and the Assembly of Representatives on the other, was Jewish immigration. The British and the Arabs wanted it curtailed and Jewish cultural, political, economic, and military organizations insisted that Palestine should be regarded as a legitimate homeland for Jews fleeing persecution.

Since the Israeli War of Independence 1948-9, several more wars, 'retribution operations', and two intifadas, have continued this struggle between Arabs and Jews for the possession of Palestine. Indeed, since 1967 Israel has subjected the Arab population of the West Bank to a stringent occupation in which growing Jewish settlement, security considerations, military priorities, and police regulations, have resulted in the carve up of Palestinian territories into ever smaller cantons - making life for the Arab population of Palestine, and of Israel as a whole, increasingly difficult and humiliating.

This is what the left and leftwing organizations committed to solidarity with Palestine are responding to - the manifest oppression of Palestinian Arabs both within Israel (defined by the borders established at the end of hostilities in 1949), and within the territories conquered and placed under military occupation since the war of 1967. Revulsion at Israel's conduct has been compounded since her unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, by the blockading of the territory, and by the large scale attacks upon Gaza carried out by the Israel Defence Force in 2008 and again in 2012.

All this misery, oppression, and bloodshed is caused by the insistence of the State of Israel that Jews have every right to live in Palestine and to

defend themselves from violent attacks carried out by Palestinians, and sponsored by their allies in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Iran.

The Palestinians are not making anything up - their land was violently partitioned by Jews and hundreds of thousands of their kin were driven into exile in the midst of war and terror. Similarly, the Jews are labouring under no illusions when they argue that since 1920 the Arabs have repeatedly attempted to drive them out of Palestine, randomly murdering Jews, orchestrating wholesale invasions by Arab armies, and more recently carrying out sustained campaigns of shootings, bombings, and rocket attacks against Israel and her citizens.

Over the years every Palestinian strike against Jews has hardened the stance of Israel, strengthening irredentist sentiment throughout the Jewish community, legitimating explicitly racist violence and greater repression against the Palestinians. This has in turn stiffened the resistance to Israel among the country's Arabs, intensifying religious intolerance, and deepening the hatred of Jews.

This vicious circle of oppression, dispossession, and violence, has worked out to the distinct disadvantage of the Arabs. The Jews, better prepared and better organized, have won every major confrontation with the Arabs. On every occasion since 1920 the Palestinians, and their Arab allies, have failed in their manichean struggle with the Jews. Israel has repeatedly come out on top and, consequently, the Palestinians have undoubtedly been more sinned against than sinning. Couple this with the fact that Israel has been more or less allied to Britain and France, and bankrolled by the United States, and the case for solidarity with the Palestinians seems to be overwhelming for those on the left.

Casting the Palestinians as the poster children of the struggle against imperialism, and Israel as

the client of Wall Street and Washington inevitably seals the deal. This cannot be said for the endless bloodletting in the Caucasus, in Sudan, in Syria, Sri Lanka, Xinjiang, or the Kurdish lands in Turkey - the left's focus cannot reasonably be everywhere at once - so it concentrates on the most pressing problem, Western imperialism. Indeed, the attention it spares for Libya or Syria, is always legitimated by the attention it pays to US involvement in the mayhem. This is why, no doubt it focuses upon US aid to Israel and ignores entirely Federal dollars poured into Palestine and Egypt continuously over the last forty or more years.

Bearing all this in mind, one solution proposed on the left is the creation of a Palestinian state in which all the Palestinian refugees that fled or were driven out in the war of 1948-9, and their descendants, are allowed to return to Israel. It is suggested that such a Palestinian state, would come fully equipped with armed forces possessing offensive capacity, with its capital in Jerusalem; it would, as a matter of course, exercise full sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza. In another version, many on the left conceive of a single secular state in which Jews and Arabs would live happily alongside each other in peace and equity.

The bitter truth is that in both leftwing versions of this projected future radical socialists imagine a world without Israel - the Zionist state would be demographically destroyed by the 'return' of hundreds of thousands Palestinian Arabs to its territories, and Jews would be once again in a permanent minority. It is difficult to credit that any sensible person could think that peace and tranquility would prevail for Jews in Palestine in the absence of the state of Israel - surely the reason for the existence of this *Jewish* state is the exigencies not only of the European Holocaust, and pogroms and persecution throughout the Arab and Persian worlds, but the Hundred Years'

War fought by Arabs against Jewish settlement in Palestine. The key institutions of the state of Israel arose in order to promote, facilitate, and defend the right of Jewish settlement in Palestine. It exists for no other purpose.

Leftwing people who endorse the Palestinian cause should come clean - they seek the dissolution of the state of Israel and *ipso facto* a new Jewish diaspora, which would follow the dissolution of the Knesset and the disbandment of the Israel Defence Force. Jews would, once again, flee from pogroms and massacres.

Behind the humanitarian focus of civilian casualties and gross oppression, promoted by the Palestinian solidarity movement, lies a refusal to grasp the brutalities of the Hundred Years' War - the preparedness of Netanyahu, Lieberman, and West Bank settlers, to promote occupation and oppression without end - is more than matched by the truly terrible Jew-hatred promoted by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the rest. Focusing upon one, while turning a blind eye to the other, is no solution at all.

The recent enthusiasm for the 'Arab Street' and revolutionary upheaval in the region is, in regard to Palestine, just another way of saying that Egypt should open the Rafah Crossing in order to facilitate the victory of Hamas, Hezbollah, and Islamic Jihad, in their struggle for the extinction of Israel. Despite the awful deaths in Gaza and the shortages, injuries, and indignities heaped upon its people, the liberation of Palestine - "From The Jordan To The Sea, Palestine Will Be Free!" - the victory of Palestinian military formations and organizations - is not a recipe for peace. On the contrary, it can only stimulate continued military intransigence on the part of Israel and most of the Jewish population in Palestine.

The truth is that without a peace imposed by America, Egypt, Turkey, France, Jordan, post-Assad Syria, and Britain, in which a Palestinian

state is established, in a manner that guarantees the integrity and security of Israel, there can be no solution.