

SECOND PRINT RUN - NOV 1980

FILE COPY



INTIFADA!

The Palestinian uprising and the fight against Zionism



by Mark Robbins
a workers power pamphlet

£1

INTIFADA!: The Palestinian uprising and the fight against Zionism

Contents

Israel's war of terror against Palestine	3
Israel - an oppressor settler state	7
Settlers as shock troops of Zionism	9
Let Palestine's refugees return home!	13
Two states, one grand illusion	17
Peace and the Zionist left in Israel	21

published by workerspower.com
BCM Box 7750, London, WC1N 3XX
email: info@workerspower.com
April 2002

Israel's war of terror against Palestine

The second Palestinian intifada is two years old. It is as yet undefeated but it is under severe attack from Israeli tanks and US foreign policy. Palestinians are paying an enormous price for their heroic resistance. Imprisoned in their own battered homes and villages, short of food, mired in poverty, stripped of employment and denied the right to travel by an enemy occupier, they endure endless new martyrs to the cause of national liberation.

The roots of this second intifada lay in Arafat's disastrous decision to co-sign the Oslo declaration of principles in 1993 with Israel, and the subsequent detailed agreements (e.g. Cairo 1994) which set out the range of the PNA's powers and security commitments made to Israel.

At Oslo Arafat agreed to legitimise Israel's redeployment of its occupying troops to those parts of the West Bank and Gaza which allowed it to defend Jewish settlements and secure the natural resources and roads that enabled them to function.

Around 59 per cent of the West Bank is officially under Israeli civil and security control. Another 23 per cent was placed under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. Barely 18 per cent was ceded to the territory governed by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

In return for this and recognition of the PLO, Arafat recognised the state of Israel. The fate of settlements and East Jerusalem were left for further negotiations during the "interim period". The negotiations on the "final settlement" were meant to be concluded in 1996 but were repeatedly delayed as one crisis after another erupted. In July 2000 attempts at a final settlement between PLO and Prime Minister Barak under Clinton's pressure failed because of Israel's intransigence on settlements and the status of Jerusalem.

In September 2000 all the contradictions of the post-Oslo peace process exploded. The manifest determination of all wings of Zionism to deny the Palestinians a meaningful independent state and substitute for this a series of disconnected, encircled bantustans finally led to a second intifada.

At the centre of this explosion lay the settlements, an ongoing and growing negation of the Palestinian's right to self-determination - a fact recognised even by US Senator George Mitchell's report in May 2001 when he recommended the Israeli government freeze all settlement activity because of their provocative character and oppressive results.

On September 11 last year the intifada was nearly one year old and was locked into a war of attrition. After September 11 George Bush gave Sharon the green light for a more brutal repression of the intifada in the name of the war against terrorism. US intervention was thereafter confined to securing a unilateral cease-fire by the PLO/PNA and to exert pressure on Arafat to arrest and crush the non-Fatah resistance fighters (Hamas, Islamic Jihad, PFLP).

In late February Sharon went far beyond the assassination of "suspected" activists

and bombing of targeted PNA or PLO/Hamas buildings that had characterised Israel's bloody oppression of the Palestinians legitimate resistance since the intifada began in September 2000.

The resistance movement responded by greater use of suicide bombers inside Israel, more daring raids on Jewish settlements and finally more effective attacks on the occupying Israeli army.

Sharon's appeal to all of Israel's Jews – that he could bring them security through use of force – was proving utterly illusory. His poll ratings plummeted from 80 per cent last summer to 45 per cent in March.

On 29 March Israel launched a full-scale invasion of areas controlled by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) with the intention of destroying the PNA infrastructure, killing or detaining hundreds of Palestinian fighters and terrorising the civilian population, especially in the refugee camps. It was a war waged with the same ferocity as Israel's invasion of the Lebanon in 1982 and the force used to subdue the first intifada ten years ago.

Israeli forces took over six major West Bank towns and cities during the two week assault – Ramallah, Qalqiliya, Jenin, Tulkarem, Bethlehem, Nablus and Hebron – and arrested more than 4,000 Palestinians. Yasser Arafat's compound in Ramallah was the first to be hit and he remained isolated there surrounded by Israeli troops.

Jenin refugee camp took the full force of the Zionist murder machine. Some of its 15,000 refugees were forced out before bulldozers cleared tank paths through crowded lanes, crushing many in the collapsed buildings. For days helicopter gunships rained down missiles on the camp. Jenin paid the price for being a proud centre of the Palestinian intifada.

The renewed occupation of the West Bank prevented any semblance of normal life for the Palestinians during the last six months. Curfews are routine and prevent people working or shopping for food. Travel between West Bank villages is almost impossible without Israeli permission.

But even this was not enough to stop the resistance; more suicide bombers attacked Israeli cities, more Jewish settlements were penetrated.

So Sharon upped the stakes once more. A new "security fence" – destined to cover the whole length of the Green Line that separates Israel from the occupied territories – is being constructed.

Retribution was exacted upon the families of "martyrs". Brothers and cousins of suicide bombers were deported to Gaza, a measure eventually deemed legal by Israel's courts. Homes of the families of martyrs were bulldozed by Israeli tanks. The fact that collective punishment, a Nazi tactic used to quell resistance during the second world war, should be adopted by a Jewish state is a bitter irony.

The arrest and assassination of activists by the IDF continued through the summer, leading to the detention of Marwan Baghouti, a key Fatah leader of the intifada – one of around 9,000 Palestinians in Israel's prisons.

Eventually, by the end of August the repression was severe enough to have stemmed the tide of attacks by Hamas and others inside Israel.

The intifada has been quelled at huge cost in terms of Palestinian suffering.

With Israeli elections next year what does Sharon aim to achieve? In early September Sharon announced that his government renounced the Oslo accords. Sharon would dearly love to negotiate a deal on pre-Oslo terms with a post-Arafat layer of PLO leaders – in other words he wants a military defeat of the intifada to lead to a political retreat by the PLO leadership and a further dilution of their ambitions for statehood. He wants the Palestinians to renounce the refugee's right to return, concede more "security zones" for the IDF and the presence of settlements in perpetuity. In other words, a UN-backed "state" without sovereignty over the air, borders or much of the interior of PNA controlled lands.

But what kind of "peace" can be imposed on a defeated PLO and PNA? Under his leadership Yasser Arafat has brought the Palestinian people to the brink of catastrophe. The mix of guerrilla struggle, bourgeois diplomacy, corrupt patronage and brutal repression of opponents has ensured that Arafat's "leadership" over the Palestinian people has resulted in his complete failure to secure self-determination for them.

Arafat's popularity among "his people" has fallen markedly since the intifada started. It was already faltering before September 2000 due to the disgust of many Palestinians at Arafat's autocratic style of government, the widespread corruption and the political violence meted out against his opponents within the West Bank by the PNA police and militia.

Under his leadership Yasser Arafat has brought the Palestinian people to the brink of catastrophe.

Support for Arafat would be even lower if it was not for the fact that the US and Israel's demand for Arafat's removal from the political scene and even from Palestine has clearly angered the Palestinian masses.

Nevertheless until the US, EU and Sharon succeed in removing him or sidelining him they will work through him to further demobilise the intifada. The CIA are actively "reforming" and "unifying" the PNA's security services under one (i.e. the USA's) command. EU commissioners drafted the statement agreed at the September session of the Palestinian Legislative Council which renounced attacks on Israelis inside Israel. The US and EU are working through PLO "moderates" to purge Arafat's cabinet and create the office of a Prime Minister to take power away from Arafat.

Arafat's own record of leadership of the PNA has made the PNA an easy target but these "reforms" will lead to nothing positive for the Palestinians; indeed, it is a further step away from self-determination for the Palestinians.

If the US and EU were at all interested in democratising the PNA then they would not oppose the elections to the PNA scheduled for early next year. But they do because they fear that Arafat will either be confirmed and/or a new generation of Palestinian leaders will come to power even more committed to getting Israel out of Palestine and rejecting any further weakening of their national demands.

But nor can Arafat and his cronies be trusted with the organising of elections – not while he has control over patronage, media and money. A revolutionary constituent assembly is urgently needed with representatives from all the refugee camps, towns and villages of the West Bank and Gaza that can freely debate and decide what kind of

government they want and what social and national demands it should press for. Without this radicalising input the renewed occupation of the West Bank and the "reform" of the PNA could indeed lead to new talks with Israel that will lead to further betrayals.

But any "peace deal" that does not remove settlements from the Gaza strip and large parts of the West Bank will simply guarantee further explosions. Any attempt by Arafat to legitimise their existence and growth in any "final settlement" which recognises a Palestinian "state" would probably cause civil war among Palestinians.

Two states living in harmony and justice is a chimera. What we have now is, de facto, the two states solution that is compatible with the existence of the state of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. The only just solution must encompass equal citizenship rights for Jews and Arabs and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their land of origin. This means a state in which Jews and Arabs are equal, not a state that defines itself specifically as "Jewish" or "Arab".

Otherwise the continued existence of an Israeli-Jewish state, even alongside a Palestinian state, would depend on the maintenance of racist citizenship laws and the exclusion of millions of Palestinians from the territory. Far from providing the basis for a lasting peace, this could only condemn the region to further cycles of repression and war.

The destruction of the Zionist character of the present state of Israel is the only basis upon which a future just settlement to the present conflict can be built. Without it there can be no right of Palestinians to return; without it there can be no end to the cancer of settlements within the body of Palestine. The opposite is also true: relinquishing the demand for the removal of settlements, (and hence the withdrawal of Israeli troops) and for the right of Palestinians to return can only confirm the exclusionist, anti-democratic character of Israel.

Only a socialist secular republic of the whole of Palestine – which has rights for all and privileges for none, based on the unity of the Jewish and Arab working class and small farmers, the nationalisation of land and the expropriation of big business and finance – can bring peace and justice to Palestine. Without justice there can be no peace.

Israel - an oppressor settler state

Zionism, as a colonial settler movement during the first part of the 20th century, had to be strategically allied to one imperialist power or another. Not only did these powers provide the funds for settlement but more importantly they controlled the Middle East. British imperialism was hegemonic there from 1918 until 1947-53 when it was supplanted by the USA.

The conflict between Zionism and Britain was not an anti-imperialist struggle by the former. Rather, it was a conflict provoked by a switch of policy by Britain in 1939.

By then British imperialism accepted that in order to maintain control over strategic resources, such as the Suez canal, rail and air routes and the oil fields of Iraq and the Gulf, it would have to oversee the creation of pliant Arab semi-colonial regimes.

This involved propping up the monarchies of Egypt, Iran, Transjordan, Iraq and the Gulf states. But this in turn meant scaling down Britain's commitment to the Zionists.

This change was evident from 1936, when the Palestinian uprising indicated the threat of Arab nationalism. But it was retarded by the outbreak of World War Two and the support for Britain given by the Zionists. But during the war the Zionist right pre-pared for the eventual conflict with Britain.

While the Irgun guerrilla group suspended operations against the British in the war the "Stern Gang" (LEHY) did not and even tried to make contacts with the fascists.

While the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem helped the SS in the war, Irgun and Haganah fought with the British. This helped transform Haganah into a professional armed force. Meanwhile the British disarmed and crushed the organisations of the Arabs in Palestine.

With the end of the war the conflict between Britain and Zionism resumed. The Zionists lobbied hard with US imperialism to get immediate permission for 100,000 survivors of the holocaust to be allowed into Palestine.

But the dominant Arabist faction within the British ruling class aimed to block this and negotiate a partition of Palestine between the Zionists and Transjordan, which would allow a strategic military presence for Britain.

But Britain both underestimated the strength of the new US-Zionist alliance and the resistance of the Palestinians to this plan. Three years of struggle to stop "illegal" immigration, to suppress both Arab and Zionist "terrorism" failed completely.

In February 1947 Britain announced it would end its mandate by August 1948. In fact, it did withdraw unilaterally in May 1948 in order to try and realise their plans by proxy, by co-ordinating an invasion of the so-called "Arab armies". In truth the only force capable of fighting the Haganah was the Arab Legion, led, trained and armed by Britain.

No serious threat was posed by the Arab forces (e.g. Egypt, Syria and Lebanon), partly because they were undertrained and underarmed as a result of previous British policy; partly because the Transjordan monarchy was only interested in a deal with the Zionists for partition around the UN proposed borders which would allow Britain a role.

But the USA was opposed to any British presence and rushed to aid the newly founded state of Israel. Stalinism too rushed to aid Israel. The Kremlin supported the creation of the state of Israel because it believed that it may have been able to exert political influence over the Zionists and so fill the vacuum created by the departure of British imperialism. In the face of this balance of forces the Palestinians suffered a historic catastrophe.

They were brutally driven out of their towns and villages throughout the area that the Zionists decided was militarily conquerable and holdable. Jaffa was attacked by Haganah and Irgun and its Arab population of 100,000 was reduced in days to 5,000. Atrocities such as Dir Yassin (250 murdered) were calculated acts of barbarity designed to spread panic and induce the Palestinians to flee.

Why did the Zionists not settle for the UN plan which the USA and Britain were happy to see? In essence because even the undemocratic UN planned partition (which awarded 54% of the area to 33% of its population that was Jewish) still left the Arabs as a bare majority in the proposed Jewish state, where they would own three-quarters of the land.

The pogroms and 1948-49 war was conducted to carry out a radical extension of the area under the control of Israel and a much reduced presence of Arabs within it. In the war the Arab states cynically grabbed what they could (e.g. Egypt, the Gaza Strip, Transjordan, East Jerusalem) but the Palestinians were left with nothing.

Israel finished with 73% of the area (including the mineral rich Negev desert) and in the process 750,000 Palestinians were driven off their land and from their homes in the wretched refugee camps into the surrounding pro-British semi-colonial Arab states.

In the conflict between the Palestinian Arabs and the Zionists it was necessary to have been defeatist in relation to the Zionists and militarily supported the resistance of the Arabs. The "War of Independence" was in fact a war to establish a pro-imperialist colonial-settler state in the Middle East, under the dominance of the USA. It was a war which denied the right of the Palestinian Arabs to self-determination.

It was correct to be defeatist in relation to the struggle waged by Transjordan and later Egypt in the War of Independence. The defeat of Israel was a lesser evil as it would have seriously disrupted the attempt of Israel to establish a stable pro-imperialist regime in the region, and one based on the expulsion of the mass of Palestinians from their land. However, we would not have supported the war aims of the Arab League which were annexationist.

We would have fought the Arab League's attempt to enforce its own version of partition, exposed the attempted deals struck with Israel against the interests of the Palestinians and been intransigent foes of the Arab League's anti-Semitism. ★

Settlers as shock troops of Zionism

Among the many reasons for the start of the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000, the massive expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza must count as the most important.

The 1993 Oslo Accords signed by the PLO and Israel were meant to reconcile Palestinian aspirations for self-determination and statehood and the existence of Israel. In fact, an aggressive policy of settlement expansion and consolidation took place over the following seven years. More Arab land was taken over and more Palestinian homes were bulldozed, more exclusively Jewish roads were built through Palestinian areas and more natural resources, such as water, were seized for the exclusive use of settlers.

In addition the existence of more and more settlers led to more and more restrictions being placed on the movement of Palestinians in adjacent areas. Incidents of provocative and violent actions by Jewish settlers towards their Arab "neighbours" increased throughout this period.

At the same time the areas placed under the full or partial control of the new Palestinian National Authority in the West Bank and Gaza strip were small, isolated and cut off from Jerusalem, a political and cultural centre for Palestinians.

When Yasser Arafat and Yitzak Rabin shook hands on the White House lawn in September 1993 there were about 115,000 Jewish settlers in West Bank and Gaza. By the time of the second intifada seven years later there were more than 200,000 of them. Reports suggest another 1,500 families (17,000 people) have been added to this total during 2001, more than the 400 settler families that have moved back to Israel under the impact of the intifada.

The 145 settlements and their adjoining territory now cover large parts of the West Bank. Currently 59 per cent of the West Bank is officially under Israeli civil and security control. Another 23 per cent of it is under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. The remainder of the territory is governed by the Palestinian National Authority.

Gaza, one of the most densely populated tracts of land in the world, is home to 1,178,000 Palestinians, 33 per cent of whom live in United Nations-funded refugee camps.

Gaza is also home to 6,900 Jewish settlers. Yet the Israeli-controlled areas and settlements take up about 40 per cent of Gaza's land. Israel controls all external borders, crossing points and major roads in Gaza.

This has all happened despite the "peace process", despite the fact that UN resolutions call for the withdrawal of Israel from areas occupied in 1967 and that settlements are against international law and formally opposed by virtually all other governments, including the US administration and the European Union.

Most recently, a US-backed fact finding committee led by former US Senator

George Mitchell set up to consider the causes of the intifada recommended in May 2001 that the Israeli government freeze all settlement activity, including the natural growth of existing settlements because of their provocative character and oppressive results.

The massive and accelerated expansion of the settlements is no accident but rather was deliberately left out of reach of the Oslo process by Israel. When he presented the Oslo 2 accords before the Knesset on October 5, 1995, the then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stated, "I wish to remind you, we made a commitment, meaning we reached an agreement, we made a commitment to the Knesset not to uproot any settlement in the framework of the Interim Agreement, nor to freeze construction and natural growth."

Although the PNA insists that under the agreement Israel was not to facilitate the building of any more Jewish settlements in the occupied territories in fact their fate was left to "final status" negotiations to be conducted at a later stage. The fact that Arafat agreed to this is just one of the many fatal flaws in the Oslo agreement.

The two major Zionist parties are agreed in practice on settlement expansion because Jewish immigration is at the heart of the Zionist state. Ever since it was established by force of arms in 1947-48 Israel has only been able to sustain its colonial project by drawing in a constant supply of Jews from around the world; hence the right of all Jews to become citizens of Israel (while all Palestinians expelled from their land to make room for them have no such right).

But Israel itself offers only limited opportunities to satisfy the aspirations of the immigrants. In order to prevent the break-up of the Zionist bloc into fractious classes and warring ethnic groups, the state promotes settlements as a way of forestalling civil discontent. Jewish settlers are given privileges at the expense of the Palestinians.

Under the Labour government of Peres and Rabin up to 1996 there was a 43 per cent increase. When Likud were in office between 1996 and 1998 the process continued. Prime Minister Netanyahu lifted curbs on expansion of Jewish settlements, saying that it was meeting their needs for natural growth. This gave rise to a burst of illegal settlements over the next two years as settlers established over 42 unofficial settlements, less than ten of which were subsequently dismantled.

Netanyahu made over \$200 million available to make it more financially attractive for Israelis to move to the settlements. Settlers pay less income tax, and business people receive grants equal to at least 20 percent of their investments.

Netanyahu also accelerated the legalised theft of Arab homes and land in East Jerusalem and the expansion of settlements there as a way of creating facts on the ground and thereby undermining the "final status" discussions on the future of Jerusalem.

Although both Labour and Likud have promoted settlement expansion Likud is more openly in favour of them, since its electoral base lies, in part, among the many thousands of recent immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who are induced to move into the Occupied Territories due to the lack of available work inside Israel itself.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, a staunch supporter of the settlers for decades, has said Jewish settlements will expand to accommodate "natural population growth".

More than 6,000 houses have government approval or are already under construction in the West Bank and Gaza, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. However, US and Israeli human rights investigators have found that there are more than 3,000 empty housing units already in the settlements, more than enough for "natural growth" for years ahead.

Since Sharon came to office, 15 informal outposts have sprung up near established settlements. Many of these are made up of religious zealots (many from the USA) who see themselves as front line Zionist warriors "claiming back" biblical land that they believe was "stolen" from Jews thousands of years ago and who will not be happy until all Palestinians on "their" land are pushed out.

It is no surprise then that settlers and settlements have come to be seen as legitimate targets for many Palestinians during the intifada. While officially Fatah, and the PLO more generally, does not target settlers, but rather Israeli Defence Forces, Hamas and Islamic Jihad have seen them as the front line Zionist occupation forces; indeed, many of the settlers are armed to the teeth and have killed a dozen Palestinians on surrounding Arab farms during the intifada.

Hamas has ambushed settlers on the roads to and from work and

school. Twenty of the 85 Israelis killed in the uprising were settlers. In recent months the Islamic guerrillas have been able to launch raids on settlements themselves, even penetrating their security fences and killing some settlers. More recently Fatah has co-operated in attacks on the settlers.

Marwan Barghouti leader of Fatah's Tanzim in the West Bank has said, "We have succeeded in making the lives of the settlers very difficult. Their settlements have become military bunkers rather than homes. Our message is simple: the Israeli people will not feel secure for as long as they continue to occupy our territory."

Revolutionary socialists believe there is an urgent need for armed defence of the Palestinians against the Jewish settlers. Suicide bomb attacks on civilians inside Israel are reactionary and counter-productive, not least because they set back the necessary attempt to promote a militant, democratic and socialist opposition to Zionism within the Jewish working class itself.

There can be no justification for attacks on innocent civilians in this way. However, the settlers can and do make themselves legitimate targets because of the role they play in the Occupied Territories.

But an offensive campaign of action by small guerrilla units as the key way to defeat Zionist occupation forces is self-defeating. The military might of Israel and the general lack of self-defence organisations within the Palestinian towns and villages means that such actions inevitably prompt massive attacks on the Palestinian population.

It is no surprise then that settlers and settlements have come to be seen as legitimate targets for many Palestinians during the intifada.

Already a small majority inside Israel favour a freeze on settlement expansion as a price for peace; a smaller number want to see them reduced or removed entirely. International campaigns exist to try to boycott the goods produced in Jewish settlements and sold abroad as "Israeli goods". Many human rights activists regularly protest against land evictions and settlement construction.

A mass united movement involving Palestinian unions, community and human rights groups, that embraces strikes, demonstrations, land occupations and an international boycott should be built to force the dismantling of settlements.

Without a reversal of Israel's settlement policy Palestinian self-determination cannot become a reality and further intifadas are guaranteed. ★

Let Palestine's refugees return home!

During and after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, almost 800,000 Palestinians were ethnically cleansed. They were turned from citizens into refugees. These refugees and their descendants are the largest and most persistent refugee group in the world with over 3.7 million registered by the United Nations and about 2 million others not registered.

The property of the refugees was stolen from them, mostly becoming state land in the possession of kibbutzim and moshavim (collective farms), land which under Israeli law may only be used by Israel's Jewish citizens. Additionally, Israel's famous Law of Return removed any citizenship or residence rights from non-Jews expelled from its territory during the 1947-1949 war, while simultaneously granting any Jewish person in the world the right to claim automatic citizenship upon arrival in the country.

The majority of Palestine's Arab population were self-sufficient peasants or tenant farmers; consequently their expulsion from their homes and the confiscation of their property left them dependent upon charity, international aid or menial work in order to survive. More than 50 years after the Nakba (catastrophe), many still live in the dehumanising refugee camps.

Why has the refugee problem persisted? United Nations Resolution 194, passed in December 1948, made Israel's UN membership conditional on the implementation of the right of the refugees to return, stating: "...the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date... compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return." Israel held off from reaching an agreement on the return of the refugees, insisting that it had to take place in the context of a general peace settlement in which the Arab states recognised the state of Israel. This insistence was made for two reasons: to prevent making permanent the borders that Israel acquired in 1948 (which many Israelis regarded as being unsatisfactory); and to turn the results of ethnic cleansing into a fact that would have to be accepted by the Arab states, thus "solving" the refugee problem at their expense and that of the refugees themselves. This remains the situation today.

Where did the refugees end up? Between one-half and two-thirds of Palestine's Arab population was displaced in 1948. Of the small number (less than 100,000) who remained under Israeli rule, most were granted Israeli citizenship – although expulsions continued well into the early 1950s under the guise of removing "infiltrators".

Various discriminatory land laws and the Law of Return created the legal category of "present absentee"; that is, Arabs who fled from their original homes to areas (usually only a short distance away) that subsequently became part of Israel. These laws confiscated their property, despite their possession of Israeli citizenship and their presence in the country. They and their descendants are a factor in the debate around the "right of return".

The largest number of refugees, about half the total, were expelled to those parts of their country which the Zionists did not occupy in 1948: the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (one of the poorest and most densely populated pieces of land in the world), under Jordanian and Egyptian rule respectively. They subsequently found themselves under Israeli occupation in 1967.

During the occupation, and until Israel's recent "closure" of the Palestinian areas, which has effectively sealed them off from the outside world, the Israeli economy drew heavily on the captive labour force in the occupied territories.

Many Palestinians would make a long daily journey from their refugee camp to work in the same lands from which they had been expelled – having to run a gauntlet of checkpoints and restrictive "security" and immigration measures in the process. For them, the "right of return" is not a demand to return to a country from which they have been separated for more than 50 years – it is a demand for full civil, national, political and economic rights in the country in which they still live.

A smaller number of refugees found themselves in Syria and the Jordanian East Bank, where they enjoy rights of permanent residence (and, in Jordan's case, citizenship). Additionally, economic migration between the west and east banks of the River Jordan gradually increased the number of Palestinians in Jordan proper to the point where they now constitute the majority of the population.

Outside of historic Palestine, the largest Palestinian refugee population is in Lebanon, where it now numbers over half a million. In order not to disrupt the demographic balance and Lebanon's French-imposed confessional political system, (based upon a fictitious Christian majority), the mainly Muslim Palestinians were barred from working in over 70 listed professions, denied rights of permanent residence, and subjected to a complex regime of legal discrimination intended to encourage their migration out of the country.

Subsequent migrations and expulsions have also taken place. From the 1950s onwards, Palestinians have emigrated to other Arab states (particularly in the oil-rich Gulf and Peninsula), to North America, Europe and Australia in search of economic opportunities denied to them in their host countries.

Palestinians were expelled from the West Bank following Israel's occupation in 1967; from Jordan in 1970 during King Hussein's suppression of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO); from Lebanon after Israel's invasion in 1982; from Kuwait following its "liberation" by US imperialism in 1991; and from Libya by their supposed friend and protector, Colonel Gaddafi. Like European Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century, they are the perennial victims of pogroms and massacres, and have little security in any of their places of exile.

Astonishingly as it may seem Israel has attempted to evade responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem. One of the most prevalent myths is that the 1948 refugees "were not expelled", but left at the request of their own leaders in order to facilitate a plan to drive the Jews into the sea.

This transparent lie flies in the face of all of the recorded historic facts. There 35 documented massacres, including the most notorious – Deir Yassin – where 250 unarmed civilians were murdered in cold blood. To deny this is historical revisionism.

A more common objection is that the absorption and reintegration of the refugees should be the responsibility of the Arab states. After all, Israel absorbed an equivalent number of Jews from the Arab countries in the immediate aftermath of 1948, many of them forced out of their countries of origin in a similarly shocking fashion. Why can't the Arab states take responsibility for their fellow Arabs, as Israel has for its fellow Jews? Socialists should reject this principle of "population exchange" out of hand, tram-pling as it does on the national rights of all peoples without exception. One crime does not excuse another.

Another argument is that "return" is economically and logistically impossible.

This, however, is a red herring. A study of the demography of Israel shows that 78 per cent of Israelis live in 14 per cent of pre-1967 Israel and that the remaining 86 per cent of the land in Israel, on which 22 per cent of Israelis live, is mostly land that belongs to the refugees. Of this 22 per cent of Israel's population, 91 per cent (20 per cent of the total) live in city centres which are mostly Palestinian, and the remaining 9 per cent (2 per cent of the total) live in kibbutzim and moshavim – the vast majority existing on refugee land.

Of the 530 locations "depopulated" in 1948, the majority are still unoccupied or lie in areas with very low population density. Contrast this to the over-crowded and inhumane conditions in the camps. Consequently, a large portion of the refugees could, almost literally, return to their towns and villages of origin without displacing a single Jew.

Socialists should support the right of return for Palestinians. The passage of time does not remove this right: it merely underlines its seriousness

As Salman Abu Sitta, president of the Palestine Land Society and former member of the Palestine National Council states: "the return of 5 million refugees and the end of the historic conflict is weighed against the livelihood of 8,600 kibbutzim, an economically bankrupt movement now largely abandoned by the Israelis themselves".

Moreover, Israel's history as a state built on immigration demonstrates that there is no question of its economic ability to absorb newcomers – if the political will is there. The total number of refugees from Gaza and Lebanon equals the number of Russian immigrants who came to live in Israel during the the 1990s.

The real objection to the return of the refugees, which all other objections are intended to obscure, is that it would undermine Israel's character as a Jewish state. It is certainly indisputable that the mass return of the refugees to their former lands would undermine the current Jewish majority within Israel's pre-1967 borders. An argument is even made that the returning refugees would inevitably "take revenge" upon the current Jewish residents, or would otherwise oppress the Jewish minority or attempt to "drive them into the sea".

This argument is a self-fulfilling prophecy that evades the question of national oppression, the responsibility of the oppressor nation (Israel) for its consequences, and the possibility of its eradication. The longer that a people is nationally oppressed, the more likely it is that their just national grievances will find expres-

sion in national hatreds.

Besides which, if Israel's character as a Jewish state can be maintained only by denying the rights of another national-ity, then this is not a national character the socialists should defend.

Socialists should support the right of return for Palestinians. The passage of time does not remove this right: it merely underlines its seriousness. But more importantly, the refugees' right of return is a national right that is a key component of the exercise of the entire Pales-tinian people's right to self-determina-tion.

The Palestinian people are oppressed as a nation not merely because they suffer Israeli occupation – their national oppression, and their national struggle against it pre-dates 1967 by twenty years.

They are oppressed as a nation because they are denied their right to self-determination within their historic homeland by a state founded on exclusivist principles. This refers not just to the apartheid-style exclusion of those under occupation or inside Israel itself, but to the physical exclusion of the Pales-tinian diaspora.

Proposed "solutions" to the refugee problem which reject the right of return and refer only to financial compensa-tion, economic integration and resettlement recognise one aspect of their individual rights, but ignore their national rights. They may alleviate the eco-nomic situation of the refugees, but will not solve the problem of their national oppression. Nor will they eliminate their own self-identification as members of the Palestinian nation, as the existence of economically integrated Palestinian communities in Jordan and Syria demonstrates.

Take the example of Gaza. Its refugee residents have no intention of leaving Gaza en masse to anywhere outside of historic Palestine – ruling out resettlement.

A solution which offered them financial compensation as a substitute for their return (in the context of a two-state solution) would amount to lit-tle more than an insulting drip-feed of international aid to a neo-colonial slum still vastly dependent upon the Israeli economy. It would not eliminate their just national grievances, and would therefore not solve the national conflict.

A "solution" based upon a combination of compensation and resettlement, however, would necessarily have to resettle the refugees in lands further away from their historic homeland than where they now live, if it was to have any pur-pose whatsoever. It can be quite safely assumed that the refugees would oppose this tooth and nail, and would resist its implementation.

"Resettlement", therefore, would amount to little more than a state-sponsored pogrom supported by the guarantees of the "international community", that is, world imperialism.

Not all of the refugees would choose to return to their lands in the event of a settlement that recognised their unfettered right to return. That, however, is their choice. The principle at stake is not merely the individual rights of a large number of displaced persons, but the national rights of an oppressed nation to determine its own national future. ★

Two states, one grand illusion

The Workers' Liberty group is notorious on the British left for its support for Zionism. It seeks to marry the right of the Palestinians to their own state with the right of Israel to exist within "secure borders".

Like most of the Zionist left in Israel they start not from the Palestinians' need for peace with justice but from Israel's need to have peace with security. Their latest pamphlet thus argues for a "two states" solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.¹

It says this is the "only solution that takes account of the rights of both sides in the conflict, and therefore it is the only rational, just and progressive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."

The authors support "an independent Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel", and emphatically defend the right of Israel to exist in areas where the Israeli Jews are a majority.

There is an immediate problem with this argument. The Israelis created a majority Jewish population in Palestine by forcibly expelling Palestinian Arabs in 1947-49 and denying them and their families the right to return to the territory of their origin.

At the same time, under the Law of Return, Jewish people of any nationality are entitled to Israeli citizenship upon arrival in Israel, even if they have never been there before.

This racist citizenship law is fundamental to the maintenance of a Jewish majority population in Palestine. If the Palestinians were allowed to return, then under any democratic system they would understandably and justifiably vote against being consigned to the status of second-class citizens and therefore against the state defining itself as specifically Jewish.

This historical reality has to be the starting point for any socialist response to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians is not simply the product of a bad policy pursued by reactionary right-wing governments. It arose directly as a result of the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine.

The only way Israel could create a Jewish majority population on its territory was to drive out millions of Palestinian people, prevent them from returning, strip them of land ownership, and wage a series of bloody wars against any Palestinians that resisted.

It is the continuation of this policy that leads to the forcible settlement of Palestinian land on the West Bank today, complete with bulldozings of Palestinian homes, discrimination in access to water supplies and a regime of permanent military repression.

This is not some bloody aberration but the logical and necessary extension of the principles that underlay the foundation of the Israeli state.

The only just solution must encompass equal citizenship rights for Jews and Arabs and the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their land of origin. This means

a state in which Jews and Arabs are equal, not a state that defines itself specifically as "Jewish" or "Arab".

The continued existence of an Israeli-Jewish state, even alongside a Palestinian state, would depend on the maintenance of racist citizenship laws and the exclusion of millions of Palestinians from the territory. Far from providing the basis for a lasting peace, this could only condemn the region to further cycles of repression and war.

As if to prove the point, the Workers' Liberty pamphlet quickly finds that support for a Jewish state in Palestine requires it to defend Israel's racist citizenship policy. The author of most of the articles in the pamphlet, Sean Matgamna, accepts that the return of the Palestinians would challenge the foundations of Israel's Jewish identity - so he rejects the right of return. In the pamphlet's introduction, written on 19 October this year, he describes the demand for the Palestinians' right to return to Israel as "collective resettlement in the territory now occupied by the Israeli Jews, most of whom were born there".

In a subsequent article, "The Origins of the Conflict" he explicitly rejects the Palestinians' right to return: "The 'right to return' in its straightforward sense is the demand that the events of the 20th century in Palestine be undone, that the film of history be rolled backwards. It is inconceivable that the Israelis will voluntarily agree to this. The demand that it should is at best the demand that the Jewish state should cease to conceive of itself as a Jewish state - not just get out of the West Bank and Gaza, and cease discriminatory or chauvinist practices, but cease to be the state of the distinct Israeli-Jewish nation. It is no more realistic than the call that the British, French, German or Irish states should cease to be British, French, German or Irish, a call quite distinct from the justified one that they should let in far more refugees and migrants. The 'right of return' therefore, in practice, comes down to the 'demand' for the conquest and destruction of Israel."

This is an extraordinary passage to have been written by anyone claiming to be a democrat, let alone a socialist.

In the first place, Matgamna admits here that the democratic right of the Palestinians to return to the territory they lived in fifty years ago stands in contradiction to the existence of a Jewish state in Palestine. How then can he expect a lasting peace on this basis? How can there be a "rational, just and progressive" solution or a lasting peace if millions of Palestinians are excluded? This argument merely proves that the whole idea of a two-state "solution" is utopian and reactionary.

Also clear from this passage is that Workers' Liberty actually prefer the rights of one group over the other - the "right" of the Israeli-Jewish people to preserve a majority secured through war, land seizures and racist laws takes precedence over the right of over three million refugees living in squalor in Lebanon, Jordan West Bank and Gaza to return.

The reason given for this is that every nation, like France, Germany, Ireland etc, has the right to national self-determination and that this must encompass the right to a state of its own. The pamphlet says that to refuse this right to the Israeli Jews is to single them out as having lesser rights than other nations. It says, "the hidden

assumption is that the Israeli Jewish nation is an illegitimate nation, and therefore does not have the same rights as other nations."

This is a dangerous and dishonest argument. Of course there are no "illegitimate nations" - the very idea could only be raised by a national chauvinist or racist. But there is a difference between a nation and a nation-state, and the state of Israel was created in very specific circumstances - the driving out of millions of Palestinians and the conquest of their land. Revolutionary socialists are not proposing to invert that crime and drive out the Israeli Jews, just to allow the Palestinians to return.

Instead of starting from this legitimate democratic national right of the Palestinian people, Workers' Liberty starts from the idea that the right to a nation-state is an abstract good, one to be supported in all situations. By contrast, revolutionary socialists support the right of self-determination only where it is not exercised at the expense of the rights of another nation.

The "right" of white South Africans to a state did not take precedence over the right of the majority black population to vote. Why should the right of the Israeli Jews to a state take precedence over the rights of millions of Palestinians?

Even the example about Britain, France, Germany or Ireland used by Matgamna backfires. France is not Israel. But if "France" had been created 50 years ago by the dispossession and driving out of millions of its original inhabitants who were of a different nationality, if those original inhabitants still lived just beyond its borders in refugee camps, if those people were in permanent rebellion and insurrection demanding their rights, then socialists in "France" and elsewhere would certainly advocate their right to return.

And if some of the "French" settler majority complained that this would violate their "right" to a nation-state, revolutionaries would expose this argument as a justification for racism and colonial conquest, not as some expression of "French" democracy.

Just how far Workers Liberty is prepared to pursue this argument is revealed in a breath-taking passage in an article entitled, without apparent irony, "Unravelling the Issues". Here the demand for the right to return of the Palestinians is presented to the pamphlets mainly British readers in the following terms:

"...the real equivalent would be if many tens of millions of people, almost as many as the population of Britain, just across the Channel, were claiming a collective right to 'repossess' Britain."

This example is obviously supposed to frighten us out of supporting the Palestinians' rights by placing the reader in the position of Israelis who view the Palestinians with hatred and fear? It tries to appeal to the reader's sense of national insecurity - a despicable thing for any socialist writer to do. Above all, it shows how shallow the writer's sense of internationalism really is. For what if it were a valid comparison?

If Britain had forcibly expelled and dispossessed "tens of millions" fifty years ago, and they were living in refugee camps just across the channel, then revolutionary socialists emphatically would support their right to return, and if that meant this island could no longer describe itself as a "British" state, we wouldn't care.

Genuine internationalism means supporting an end to all oppression on the grounds of nationality, not declaring that recent national and colonial conquests should be treated as final accomplished historical facts just so the victors can maintain their supremacist nation-states.

Workers Liberty's "killer argument" in support of the two states solution is that the largest Palestinian organisation, the PLO, also supports it. This is true - but it is a result of the PLO leadership's fatal policy of compromise with Israel and their abandonment of the historic rights of their own people.

The PLO under Yasser Arafat has persistently accommodated to Israel, handing over the names and addresses of Palestinian radicals to the Israelis even during their campaign of assassinations, allowing the Israelis to wriggle out of every one of their obligations under successive peace treaties, demanding an end to Palestinian resistance in favour of continued talks that yield nothing and utilising their position within the Palestine National Authority to demobilise mass resistance while the leaders enrich themselves and persecute their opponents.

A Palestinian state existing alongside Israel would be like the PNA today - a powerless Bantustan, leaving all the real control and might in the hands of Israel. That is why the task of revolutionary socialists is not to devise ever more "Marxist" excuses for Israeli domination of the region, but to fight for a genuine, lasting solution.

This is not, despite Workers Liberty's insinuations, a policy of "driving the Jews into the sea", but a socialist republic with no single religious or national allegiance one in which Arabs and Jews live together as equal citizens. The only force that can bring it into being is the working class, peasantry and urban poor of the Middle East. The longer the Palestinian left equivocates on this issue, the more likely it will be that the PLO's failings will drive the heroic youth of the Intifada into the arms of the Islamists like Hamas, who do indeed propose the reactionary solution of driving out the Jews.

As Karl Marx said, a nation which oppresses another can never itself be free. For long as there is a racist and discriminatory Jewish state in the Middle East, the consequences will be disastrous for the Palestinians and the Jews alike. ★

¹ Two Nations, *Two States - Socialists and Israel/Palestine*, a Workers' Liberty pamphlet, October 2001.

Peace and the Zionist left in Israel

The historic mission of the Israeli peace movement has always been to guarantee the security of the Jewish state through an accommodation with the ruling classes of the region.

This was as opposed to the "hawks" alternative policy of maintaining an "Iron Wall" of overwhelming military superiority and an alliance with US imperialism against popular movements and radical nationalist regimes.

In other words, the peace movement has aspired to be the proponent of a pragmatic Israeli foreign and security policy – and not to be the ally of the oppressed Palestinians.

It is therefore instructive to examine precisely what "peace" is understood to mean in Israeli political discourse, and why a peace movement did not exist for such a large part of the state's history.

The war that followed the partition of Palestine in 1948 resulted in a victory for the Zionists – the creation of a Jewish state with a Jewish majority across its territory. But it did not lead to the acceptance of this state's existence, either by the Palestinian Arabs whom it displaced and dispossessed to make room for new waves of Jewish immigration, or by the neighbouring Arab states that it defeated in war.

This was the only real failure of the Zionist movement amidst a plethora of successes. The outcome of the war demonstrated that Israel's existence was not seriously threatened by external military dangers. Likewise, the quiescence of the defeated Palestinian Arab minority remaining in Israel after the partition – a fraction of the pre-1948 Arab population of that territory – meant that Israel's character as a Jewish state was not seriously threatened from within, either.

There was therefore no Israeli peace movement in this period. The idea that was widely propagated was that while Israel wanted peace, the Arabs did not. In this view, "peace" meant the acceptance of Israel's existence as a Jewish state within the borders it had acquired in war – with, possibly, a few modifications in its favour.

It meant the absorption or resettlement of the Palestinian refugees outside of their historic homeland – essential to ensure that Israel's Jewish majority was maintained. It meant acceptance by the Arabs of the political, territorial and demographic consequences of their military defeat.

Most importantly, "peace" was regarded as something to be concluded with the existing Arab states – with their colonial-era boundaries and Western puppet regimes lacking in popular legitimacy. It was not something to be concluded with an amorphous entity without a state called the Palestinian people – whose existence as a nation distinct from other Arab nations, possessing historic aspirations in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, was explicitly denied.

There was effectively an Israeli national consensus on this issue – the only break in it being the demands of expansionist politicians on both right and left that Israel

should capture the West Bank and Gaza Strip – respectively under Jordanian and Egyptian rule.

While many in the ruling Labour Party establishment saw the possibility of reaching a political settlement – either with Hashemite Jordanian monarchy, or even with Nasser's Egypt – the price Israel demanded for peace was too high for any Arab leader to risk overthrow by accepting it.

And while a "doveish" group in the governmental elite around Moshe Sharett pursued semi-secret contacts with Jordan and Egypt, a more "hawkish" group around David Ben-Gurion repeatedly sabotaged their diplomatic efforts – through conscious acts of military escalation around the cease-fire lines.

This group included such prominent future figures as Yitzak Rabin, Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan, and Ariel Sharon – leftists as well as rightists in today's political lexicography. Their attempt to prevent an accommodation with the Arab states – and with Egypt in particular – succeeded when Israel joined Britain and France in attacking Egypt over the Suez canal in 1956, an event which electrified the Arab masses and pushed Nasser towards confrontation with Israel.

The Six-Day War of June 1967 dramatically changed the demographic and territorial picture. In this war, Israel conquered all the remaining territory of the former British mandate of Palestine, and found itself ruling a compact, militant and nationally conscious population of two million Palestinians in the process.

Additionally, it occupied the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights, territory belonging to internationally recognised states.

Again, this war – and its conquests – aroused little indignation from any nascent Israeli peace movement. It was portrayed as a war of defence against a coalition of Arab states bent on driving the Jews into the sea.

The Occupied Territories were seen as a bargaining chip in future negotiations with the Arab states, if not as an integral part of Eretz Israel. And again, peace was something to be achieved with the existing regimes or with suitable replacements acting over the Palestinians, heads, and not with the Palestinians themselves. It was in this period that Golda Meir made her famous statement that "there is no such thing as a Palestinian people".

Even the war with Egypt and Syria in October 1973 – in which Israel suffered 2,000 casualties and was caught off-guard – led to criticisms of the government for its lack of military preparedness, rather than for its political failure to achieve a peace with the states concerned. The subsequent peace between Egypt and Israel was the result of political developments in Egypt, and not the existence of an Israeli peace movement.

It was not until Israel found itself mired in an unwinnable guerrilla war in Lebanon in the 1980s – shattering the illusion that military superiority alone could guarantee Israel security – that a mass Israeli peace movement emerged. And it was not until the first Intifada broke out in 1987 that Israelis – the peace movement included – realised that the Palestinians had become a force to be taken into account as well as the Arab regimes.

The largest and most well-known of the Israeli "peace" organisations is "Peace

Now". It was founded in March 1978 by 348 reserve commanders, officers, and combat soldiers of the Israel Defence Forces. Their objective was to pressure the Likud government to bring about a politically negotiated settlement with Egypt, Syria and Jordan, the frontline Arab states whose territory had been lost in the 1967 war.

Their argument was that security required a political settlement as well as military superiority - and they wrote to prime minister Menachem Begin that: "Real security can be achieved only when we achieve peace." This obsession with Israeli security, rather than with the roots of the national conflict, has been a hallmark of this group and the Israeli peace movement as a whole.

During Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the movement mushroomed, mobilising 400,000 people (one-tenth of the country's population) to demonstrate for Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and a commission of enquiry into the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, in which Israel was implicated - with Sharon himself identified as the architect of the butchery.

When the Intifada broke out in 1987, Peace Now argued for negotiations with the PLO and claims the credit for paving the way for the Oslo accords.

While claiming to be a non-party organisation, it has long been associated with the "doveish" wing of the Labour party establishment, and has supported former Labour-led governments such as those of Ehud Barak, Shimon Peres and Yitzak Rabin.

Today, their own stated objectives include, "Israeli withdrawal to safe borders from the West Bank and Gaza; creation of a Palestinian state subject to strict military limitations; negotiation of security and peace accords between Israel and Syria leading to a safe Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights; and a resolution on the status of an undivided Jerusalem that accommodates the national aspirations and religious needs of both Israeli and Palestinian residents."

In practice, this means that they oppose full withdrawal to the 1967 cease-fire lines, expect the Palestinians to accept a capital city outside of Jerusalem's historic boundaries, and insist that a Palestinian state should be prevented from having arms and military formations that might pose a threat to Israel's security. They also seek to exclude foreign (that is, Arab) military forces from Palestinian territory.

Equally, they insist that the Palestinian Authority "has the responsibility to make a maximum effort to thwart terror ... resume effective security co-operation with Israel; arrest and prosecute within the full extent of the law those Palestinians who engage in terrorism..."

Peace Now rejects the right of return of the refugees, arguing that this demand is an unacceptable threat to Israel's integrity, demographics and sovereignty". Instead, it argues for the return of Palestinian refugees, not to their homes in pre-1967 Israel, but within the boundaries of a future Palestinian state, "as Jews are allowed the right of return within the borders of the State of Israel", and limit themselves to the repatriation of limited numbers of refugees into Israel as part of a programme of family reunification.

They argue that "settlement building must be frozen during the peace process until such time as the future of the territories, including the status of the settlements, has been negotiated", and that settlers who want to return to Israel should be

financially assisted to do so. But they do not call for the full removal of the settlements - rather that settlers who remain in place "should understand that they will be subject to Palestinian law and sovereignty", and that Israel and the Palestinians may negotiate border adjustments that would annex a portion of settlements to Israel while leaving others under Palestinian control.

Taken as a whole, this places their programme extremely close to the mythically "generous offers" that Ehud Barak presented to the Palestinians at Camp David in July 2000, whose rejection preceded the outbreak of the current uprising.

It is therefore not surprising that their reaction to the Palestinian uprising in September 2000 was a sense of betrayal by their "partners in peace". They remained largely silent as the government of their favoured candidate for prime minister, Ehud Barak, used brutal and indiscriminate force against civilians to crush the uprising.

Author Amos Oz, one of Peace Now's leading lights, went so far as to argue in February 2001 that the "doves" should "re-examine their perch", that it was no longer the case that "the sole obstacle to peace is Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories", that Israel had presented the most far-reaching offer that it could make, and that the Palestinian nation had "rejected peace".

Another important group is Meretz which describes itself as "The Israeli Social Democratic and Peace-seeking Party". Its programme commits it to "human rights, equality, social justice, Israel's security, and to the values of humane Zionism". Like Peace Now, it opposes any division of Jerusalem or a full withdrawal to the cease-fire lines of 1949, arguing that they "have never been internationally recognised borders", and argues that negotiations over future borders must be related to security and demographic considerations, so that Israel's security will be enhanced. Similarly, it argues that the evacuated territories "will be demilitarised, and any violation will entitle Israel to act in accordance with the fundamental right of self-defence".

While calling for a settlement freeze, Meretz says that "Israel will do everything in its power to protect its citizens" in the territories prior to a negotiated settlement, and Meretz fights to ensure that the Israel Defence Force receives "the full budgetary resources needed to preserve its might and its superiority in qualitative, technological and human terms over all the armies of the region".

Equally, it calls for the return of the Palestinian refugees to the territory of a future Palestinian state, but not to their lands in pre-1967 Israel. As a political party, it has repeatedly taken part in coalition governments led by the Labour establishment, including Ehud Barak's.

The defining feature of this wing of the peace movement has been its dependence on the Labour establishment, its argument for "peace" as an extension of Israeli security policy, its commitment to a negotiated settlement and a two-state solution, and therefore also to the defence of the Jewish state.

The Oslo accords were a godsend to this movement, appearing as they did to vindicate their historic policy. This has made them into more or less uncritical admirers of Labour-led governments when they were engaged in the "peace process". It has also pitted them against the Palestinians when their resistance has erupted into con-

frontation with the Israeli state.

Just as significantly, it has placed it on the defensive against the Israeli right when Israeli security is threatened by Palestinian resistance, and when repression is seen to produce better results than negotiation in creating "security".

The most militant of the Israeli peace organisations is Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc). Its most prominent figure, radical Israeli journalist Uri Avnery, established secret contacts with senior PLO figures in 1974 and famously visited Yasser Arafat during the Israeli siege of Beirut in 1982. His organisation calls for full Israeli withdrawal to the cease-fire lines of 4 June 1967, unilaterally if necessary, and the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

It also calls for a recognition in principle of the right of return for the Palestinian refugees, although insists that the return of Palestinians to Israel should be subjected to strict quotas over a ten-year period following a political settlement.

Nevertheless, this is still much further than any other group or organisation has gone in recognising the historic injustice committed against the Palestinian people by the creation of Israel. Avnery and Gush Shalom are still committed to a Jewish state and a two-state solution - however, they embody the most extensive version of it.

Like other sections of the peace movement, Gush Shalom called for a vote to Rabin in 1992, Peres in 1996 and Barak in 1999. Unlike other figures on the Israeli left, Avnery defended the Palestinian's right to resist following their uprising in September 2000, denounced Barak's "generous offers" to the Palestinians for being the humiliating demand for surrender that they were, and refused to support Barak during the elections that led to his downfall and the creation of a government led by Ariel Sharon.

Nevertheless, he anticipates that the creation of a Palestinian state in a two-state solution will enable Arafat to isolate and demobilise the Palestinian uprising - that is, to strip it of its revolutionary potential for transforming the whole region. Just as the Peace Now and Meretz wing of the peace movement argue for a negotiated settlement and partial withdrawal as the best guarantee of Israeli security, Avnery and Gush Shalom argue for a two-state solution and full withdrawal as the price of bourgeois democratic stability. Instead of being a fellow-traveller with Labour Zionism, this makes him a fellow-traveller of Fatah's bourgeois Palestinian nationalism.

Ultimately, the real obstacle to the Israeli left's goal of a two-state solution is Israel's own domestic political, social and economic division. Israel has maintained the internal unity of its Jewish population through its policy of occupation and settlement-building, thus buying off disaffected (Jewish) minorities by granting them privileges at the expense of the Palestinians.

Any withdrawal from the territories or abandonment of the settlements would result in the loss of the social position held by those sections of Israeli Jewish society whose livelihood depends upon the spoils of occupation, and would result in an internal Israeli conflict. This is why Israeli governments of both right and left have clung so tenaciously to the settlements, and with them have prevented an accommodation with the forces of "moderate" bourgeois Palestinian nationalism.

It is also why a two-state solution will not bring about peace between the Israeli and Palestinian peoples - as a militarily stronger Israel will always have recourse to renewed expansionist aspirations in order to guarantee the internal stability of the Jewish state, in whatever boundaries the Jewish state might exist. A genuine peace between the peoples, and not merely their ruling classes, will only come about with the abolition of all national privileges, including the privilege of having a Jewish state built upon the ruins of a Palestinian Arab nation.

Nevertheless, co-operation with the Israeli peace movement is possible. Their various activities - of monitoring human rights abuses, civil rights violations and settlement-building, their acts of protest against the occupation, and their calls for withdrawal from the Occupied Territories - are all supportable, and can form a basis for common action with anyone committed to defence of the national rights of the oppressed Palestinian Arab people.

However, revolutionary socialists believe that only a complete break with any defence of their own national privileges, and therefore also with Zionism and the defence of the Jewish state, will allow a just and lasting peace to become a reality. ★

www.workerspower.com

SUBSCRIBE

Please send Workers Power direct to my door each month. I enclose:

- £9.00 UK
 £20 Europe
 £18.00 Rest of the world

Name: _____

Address: _____

JOIN US!

- I would like to join the Workers Power group
 Please send more details about Workers Power

Name: _____

Address: _____

phone: (+ + 44) 020 7820 1363 email: info@workerspower.com



- I want to subscribe for a year (£2) I want to join Revo I want _____ copies to sell
 No thanks I'm going to be a stockbroker

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

School/college _____

Send to: REVO, BCM 7750, London WC1N 3XX or Email: join@worldrevolution.org.uk

phone:

07951 493 232

For more information on the products and services we offer, please call 1-800-233-2333

WWW.WORKETSPHERE.COM

JOIN US!

Work from home. Flexible hours. No experience necessary. We are looking for motivated individuals to join our team. If you are interested, please contact us at 1-800-233-2333.

First Name: _____
 Last Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____
 State: _____
 Zip: _____
 Phone: _____

SUBSCRIBE

Subscribe to our newsletter and receive the latest news, tips, and offers. We will never give your information to anyone else.

First Name: _____
 Last Name: _____
 Address: _____
 City: _____
 State: _____
 Zip: _____
 Phone: _____

Phone: 1-800-233-2333 (Toll Free) Email: info@worketsphere.com



1-800-233-2333
 1-800-233-2333
 1-800-233-2333

phone: 07581 482 232