



There is no alongside

The brutal invasion of Gaza by Israel's armed forces and the rise of the far right in the Israeli elections that followed has appalled people all over the world. It has also hammered a further nail in the coffin of the idea that a Palestinian state can live in peace alongside the Zionist state. Keith Harvey strips away the last shreds of credibility from the "two-state solution"

ISRAEL IS a state based on ethnic cleansing. The foundation of the state in 1948 was prepared by the bloody, forcible transfer of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their town and villages. Led by David Ben-Gurion, this ethnic cleansing was planned in every detail while the British prepared to hand its Palestinian mandate to a United Nations (UN) still deliberating how to divide the country between the indigenous population and its new colonists.

In 1947, while still under the British mandate rule, Palestine had a population of 1.29 million Arab Palestinians and 608,000 Jews, one-third of whom had arrived after the war. Jews owned a mere 6% of the land. The UN eventually proposed to give them 55%; Jews were to get the "more economically developed part of the country" according to the UNSCOP resolution that recommended partition.¹ In the Jewish state nearly half the population would be Arabs, compared to less than 2% of Jews in the Arab state.

But even this betrayal of Palestinian national rights was unacceptable to Ben-Gurion who sought as much as 80-90% of the territory for the Zionists, a territory in which they intended to be an overwhelming majority. When war broke out in late 1947 the Zionist militias moved swiftly according to their by now well-rehearsed plan. As one historian recently put it:

"Once the decision was taken, it took six months to complete the mission. When it was over, more than half of Palestine's native population, close to 800,000 people, had been uprooted, 531 villages had been destroyed, and eleven urban neighbourhoods emptied of their inhabitants . . . a clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation, regarded under international law today as a crime against humanity."²

Half a year of mayhem and killing saw 78% of the land in Israeli hands, with the rest under Egyptian or Jordanian control. Less than 180,000 Arabs were left behind in Israel. Successive wars of conquest in 1967 and 1973 put more

living in peace Zionism

Palestinian land under Israeli control, leading to decades of continuous occupation, land theft and forcible transfer of more Palestinians. Court decisions sometimes gave a veneer of legality to this licensed plunder. This process has never stopped. According to Amnesty International in the first five years of this decade alone more than 4,000 homes, vast areas of agricultural land, commercial properties, and infrastructure throughout the Occupied Territories were destroyed by Israeli forces, leaving tens of thousands of Palestinians homeless and destitute.³

In the election campaign for this February's general elections in Israel the spectre of further ethnic cleansing was never far from view. Avriil Lieberman, leader of the far right Israel Beytenu, made clear his plans to expel "disloyal" Arab Israeli citizens for their refusal to fight for Israel and their opposition to Israel's onslaught in Gaza. His party became the third largest in the Knesset, eclipsing Labour. Moledet, part of the National Union bloc which gained three seats, makes it clear that "it embraces the idea of population transfer".⁴

Lieberman is the kingmaker in the discussions over the coalition government; his support is key to forming a stable government around Likud. The price for this support will include government ministries through which to pursue their agenda. Its presence will further legitimise the spectre of "population transfers".

That the far right of Zionism is in the ascendancy is no accident. Zionism faces a crisis of direction. As the Palestinian population in Israel and the occupied territories grows it threatens to imminently outnumber the Zionist Jews. Unable to find a Palestinian "partner for peace" – that is, a Palestinian leadership that is willing or able to accept a few strips of surplus land, heavily policed by Israel and slap a label "state" on it – Israel seeks a unilateral solution that guarantees it a Jewish majority in the lands it controls.

The 2005 withdrawal from Gaza was part of that "solution" but it backfired, resulting in Israel's blockade, incur-

sions and finally, all-out invasion in December 2008. For many this was the final nail in the coffin of the "peace process".

Creating facts on the ground

In the wake of Israel's attack on Gaza many commentators despair of the prospects of Palestinians and Israelis living alongside each other in two peaceful states.

The Financial Times ruminated in January, as the smoke cleared from Gaza's ruins, whether the war "has dealt the last blow to the peace process and the prospect of a two-state solution to six decades of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians." ⁵ It continued:

"time is running out on the two-state solution . . . since the Oslo peace accords between Israelis and Palestinians

More than 120 Jewish settlements containing 275,000 settlers have carved up the bulk of the territory earmarked as the site of the Palestinian state

were signed in 1993, setting the stage for the two-state solution, Israeli policies have made the application on the ground gradually impossible."

A drive into the West Bank from Jerusalem makes clear why. More than 120 Jewish settlements (illegal under international law ⁶) containing 275,000 settlers have carved up the bulk of the territory supposedly earmarked as the site of the Palestinian state.⁷ More than half of these settlers arrived after the Oslo accords were signed, an agreement supposedly freezing settlement development. Between 1993 and 2002 Israel confiscated 240 sq km of Palestinian

land and demolished more than 4,000 Palestinian homes, affecting 100,000 people. In addition, and as a result of this, Jewish industrial production in the West Bank area doubled,⁸ while a further 180,000 settlers live in east Jerusalem, occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

Indeed, the Israeli pull-out from the Gaza strip in 2005 was used as a smokescreen for ramping up the settlement process in the West Bank. While the media focused on the 8,000 settlers uprooted from their 2,000 or so illegal

While Israel says the country exists as a haven for Jews facing persecution, the reality is that Jewish immigrants are relied upon to save the Israeli state

homes, Israel was in the process of erecting a further 6,400 homes in the West Bank. The Guardian reported that in the first three months of 2005 new building in Jewish settlements increased by 83% on the year earlier.⁹ In July alone that year Israel seized more land on the West Bank than it vacated in Gaza by pulling out, and 14,500 settlers moved into new homes in 2005 compared to the 8,500 that were removed from Gaza.

Despite all the international resolutions calling for an end to settlement expansion, and the occasional disapproving noises made in US and EU government circles, the settlements are an essential component of Zionism and will never be renounced. This is for two reasons: first, only they can attract and find room for Jewish immigrants (the right of return) which is a corner stone of Zionist ideology; and secondly, settlements are the way of securing that part of Israel's hinterland that contains the water resources and fertile land deemed essential for the European-style levels of consumption enjoyed by its Jewish citizens – a factor necessary to keep Israel's cross-class bloc united. As the then prime minister Ariel Sharon put it in 2001:

“Is it possible today to concede control of the hill aquifer, which supplies a third of our water? . . . you know, it's not by accident that the settlements are located where they are.”¹⁰

Separation barrier

In 2002 Israel decided to build a barrier between the West Bank and Israel to control the movement of Palestinians into Israel. It has been largely constructed inside West Bank territory, not along the so-called Green Line which marks the 1967 border between Israel and the now occupied territories.

Despite Israel's claims that the barrier is intended to enhance security for Israel's citizens, the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem has described the real function:

“A major aim in setting the route was de facto annexation of land: when the Barrier is completed, some nine

percent of the West Bank, containing 60 settlements, will be situated on the western – the ‘Israeli’ – side. Another reason for building the Barrier inside the West Bank was to avoid the political price to be paid if the Green Line were set as Israel's border. . . . It is reasonable to assume that, as in the case of the settlements, the Separation Barrier will become a permanent fact to support Israel's future claim to annex additional land.”¹¹

Not only does the land grab involved in these settlements and the barrier rob any putative Palestinian state of the necessary land for its citizens but each new settlement means the Israeli army imposes ever more restrictions on the freedom of movement of the 3.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank. Palestinians are forbidden to use, or are restricted in their use, of more than 300 kilometres of roads in the West Bank, according to B'Tselam.¹²

In addition about 100 permanent manned checkpoints and on average, per month in 2007, 459 physical obstacles to Palestinian movement in the West Bank, make a mockery of the so-called autonomy enjoyed by the Palestinian National Authority and destroy the ability of the Palestinians to farm their land and make a living. As one author notes, the Barrier “snakes for hundreds of kilometres through the West Bank, slicing streets down the middle, dividing villages, cutting families off from each other, students from their schools, patients from hospitals and farmers from their crops.”¹³ A UN human rights reporter has likened the restrictions it imposes on movement to the South African apartheid “pass laws.”¹⁴

New York Times journalist Thomas Friedman in a first hand account noted earlier this year its consequences and costs:

“The West Bank is so chopped up and divided now by roads, checkpoints and fences to separate Israel's crazy settlements from Palestinian villages that a Palestinian could fly from Jerusalem to Paris quicker than he or she could drive from Jenin, here in the northern West Bank, to Hebron in the south.”¹⁵

According to Ali Abunimah “The settlements and their attendant infrastructure and Jewish-only connecting highways control 42% of the West Bank.”¹⁶

At a certain point in this expansionary process it was inevitable that Palestinians would realise that the land anointed for their putative state to “co-exist” alongside Israel had effectively vanished. According to the Financial Times, it is not surprising then that “over the past year, scores of Palestinian intellectuals and analysts have been writing about the demise of the two-state solution – and a raft of opinion polls last year showed that more and more Palestinians were calling for a single, bi-national state shared by Israelis and Palestinians.”¹⁷

Even long time Israel supporter and proponent of two-states, Thomas Friedman, concluded in January that: “the settlers have steadily worked to make [the two-state solution] impossible.”¹⁸ B'Tselem agrees: “The sharp changes Israel made to the map of the West Bank make a viable Palestinian state impossible as part of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.”¹⁹

Leading Palestinian intellectual and campaigner Edward Said had reluctantly come to the same conclusion a year or so before his death in 2003. Having supported a two-

state solution for years as part of the peace process, he become bitterly disillusioned by the failure of the Oslo accords, the rampant expansionism in the ten years after they were signed and the utter failure of the PLO Fatah leadership to advance the nationalist cause.

He argued that any solution now:

“... must begin in terms of citizenship not nationalism, since the notion of separation (Oslo) and of triumphalist unilateral theocratic nationalism, whether Jewish or Muslim, simply does not deal with the realities before us. Therefore the concept of citizenship, whereby every individual has the same citizen's rights, based not on race or religion, but on equal justice for each person guaranteed by a constitution, must replace all our outmoded notions of how Palestine will be cleansed of our enemies.”²⁰

Kadima; two states via reactionary separation?

But it was not only leading Palestinians that recognised how Zionist policies were fatally undermining the possibility of a two-state solution. So did Israel's leaders, and they were horrified at the implications. In 2003, before he became Kadima prime minister, Ehud Olmert warned:

“We don't have unlimited time. More and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution, because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one, from a struggle against 'occupation' in their parlance, to a struggle for one-man-one-vote. That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle – and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us it would mean the end of the Jewish state.”²¹

Why the panic? During 2005 Jews found themselves a minority in the lands they controlled. In Israel, West Bank and Gaza strip combined, Jews numbered 5.26 million and Palestinians nearly 5.45 million. One Israeli demographer predicted, given present birth rates that by 2020 there will be 6.3 million Jews and nearly 9 million Palestinians there.

Israel has relied since its foundation upon mass immigration of Jews from around the world to boost its population. While Israeli governments say the country exists as a haven for Jews around the world facing persecution, the reality is that Jewish immigrants are relied upon to save the Israeli state. Successive governments have had the goal of attracting one million immigrants to the country by 2020. While about one million Jewish emigrants left the USSR after 1989 to settle in Israel (many more chose to go elsewhere) in recent years immigration has tailed off. Net migration was zero in 2006 and as former USSR countries join the EU many of the younger Russian immigrants have rushed to apply for EU passports as a prelude to emigrating there.²²

Kadima was born of an attempt to “deal” with this demographic problem. It was launched in 2004 by Ariel Sharon and drew in leading figures from Likud and other parties. It proposed to deal with the dilemma articulated by Olmert:

“We are approaching the point where more and more

ARGUMENTS AGAINST ZIONISM

Israel as a 'safe haven'

➤ ONE ARGUMENT used to favour a two-state solution is that for all its democratic defects Jews need Israel as a safe haven from anti-Semitism around the world and this is their right.

There are two problems with this. First, if this is the case then one would expect many Jews to take advantage of Israel's safe haven when it is offered to them. But, as we have explained, most Jews prefer to go elsewhere. Most emigrate to the US or within Europe to Germany. In fact Israel has to go to great and absurd lengths to try and induce the Jewish diaspora to come and live in Israel, even inviting and converting hundreds of thousands of Muslims and Christians.

The few thousand US Jews who trek each year to Israel are not seeking a safe haven from persecution or the threat of it but are largely fanatical Zionists keen to sign up as shock troops to go and occupy a settler “outpost” in the West Bank and snipe at

Palestinian farmers in drive by shootings.

The reason so many prefer to give Israel a wide berth is of course that Israel is one of the world's most insecure places for a Jew to live. First, there are the threats and reality of rocket attacks from Hamas or Hezbollah, as well as suicide bombs in Tel Aviv and (as in Lebanon in 2006) the threat of death while serving in the IDF invading a neighbouring Arab country.

Add to this the constant bellicosity of Iran threatening to wipe out Israel and it is hard to see the attractiveness of Israel as a safe haven for the world's Jews. Indeed the actions of the Zionist state, its war crimes and oppression of the Palestinian Arabs fans the flames of anti-Semitism around the world; its policies both shock and threaten Jews around the world. Jews do not need the Israeli state to save them. Rather the Israeli state needs the world's Jews to save it.

Palestinians will say, “There is no place for two states between the Jordan and the sea. All we want is the right to vote.” The day they get it, we will lose everything.”²³

What he meant was that democracy, the right to vote for Palestinians in Israeli-controlled territory would lead to the dissolution of the specifically Jewish character of the state of Israel, an end to the privileges for one ethnic group – an end to Zionism.

To pre-empt or at least delay this Kadima unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and hence “got rid of” 1.4 million Palestinians, giving Jews 57% of the region's population under its control. Yet as one commentator has said, disengagement: “is an effort to define boundaries for the state that assure a Jewish majority, but does not involve genuinely giving up control of the occupied territories; the withdrawal from Gaza, with Israel maintaining its grip on the borders and its right to military action, demonstrates this clearly.”²⁴ Olmert was explicit about this in a 2003 interview: “Israel will keep the security zones, main settlement blocs, and places important to the Jewish people, first of all Jerusalem, united under Israeli control.”²⁵

The original architect of the Kadima disengagement plan, Arnon Soffer, was explicit that the separation plan by no means ensured peace, just a Jewish majority.

Prophetically, he said that the day after unilateral separation, “the Palestinians will bombard us with artillery fire – and we will have to retaliate. But at least the war will be at the fence – not in the kindergartens of Tel Aviv and Haifa.”²⁶ Anticipating by five years the massive bombardment of Gaza last December Soffer predicted:

“We will tell the Palestinians that if a single missile is fired over the fence, we will fire ten in response. And women and children will be killed and houses will be destroyed . . . It’s going to be a terrible war. So if we want to remain alive, we will have to kill and kill and kill. All day, every day.”

Soffer may have believed that the war with Hamas would stay at the fence, but it is clear that Hamas’ rockets are increasingly capable of hitting Israeli targets much further afield. As Ali A says:

“Unilateral separation offers Israel a Jewish-Zionist state at the price of constant bloodshed and growing Palestinian desperation, which, despite all efforts to wall it out, will deprive Israelis of the normality they crave. It is not a solution, but a dangerous delusion.”²⁷

An even more reactionary version of this “two-state”

solution is proposed by Avidigot Lieberman’s, Yisrael Beiteinu, which won 15 seats in the latest election, up from 11 in 2006 and has the third largest number of seats after Kadima and Likud. Prominent among its campaign messages was his insistence that Israeli Arab citizens be made to declare a “loyalty oath” to the state (including a willingness to fight in the army) or have their voting rights removed. Yisrael Beiteinu’s policy is for Israel to be an ethnically pure Jewish state which would be achieved by establishing a Palestinian “state” out of parts of the West Bank, evacuating some Jewish settlements and even small parts of Israel, and then herding Israel’s Arabs into it.²⁸

The Russian-origin settlers that form the social and electoral base of Yisrael Beiteinu have profited directly from Palestinian dispossession and subsidies from the Israeli Jewish state that are denied to Arabs.

The truth is that the political situation in Israel-Palestine is polarising rapidly between a multi-national single state solution on the one side and more and more reactionary scenarios for preserving the exclusively Jewish character of Israel on the other. In this way the PLO dream of a two-

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BOYCOTT

Isolate Israel!

A KEY part in this class polarisation inside Israel has to be played by anti-Zionist forces in the wider Arab world as well as the US and Europe. Millions of people throughout the world were outraged at Israel’s slaughter in Gaza earlier this year. They did not accept the lies of Zionist propaganda: that Hamas brought this destruction on itself, that Israel acted to protect its own security, that its response was necessarily disproportionate and so on. This shows the potential exists to isolate Israel and to make it pay a high price for its actions.

In Europe and in the US renewed calls have been made to organise an international movement to boycott Israel’s economy and society. Israel has in recent years – directly as a result of the Oslo accords – increased its integration into the world economy due to preferential trade agreements with the EU and with several Middle Eastern and Latin American countries. It continues to receive \$3bn in aid a year from the US. Its military depends on weapons,

spare parts and intelligence assistance from Europe and the US. Its universities and arts thrive upon the credibility given to them by international conferences and festivals.

Its ability to ignore international criticism results from it being allowed to snub the rulings of the UN, to believe its allies can forever prevent it being brought to account for its war crimes in the way that East European or African ethnic cleansers and war criminals are.

Now is the time to reverse all this and to emulate the mass international anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s that helped to force the government of De Klerk in South Africa to dismantle its repressive regime. The international isolation of apartheid raised the morale of the resistance movement inside South Africa; it played an important part in rallying support to the worker and township revolts that finally convinced the white population and government that they could not continue to govern in the old way.

Israel will not listen to reason; it is deaf to the pleas for justice. It is an inherently oppressive and

expansionist state if left to its own devices or supported in its goals. It will only change its actions if it is forced to pay a heavy price, politically and economically. Only if Israel’s external financial backing is withdrawn and boycott enforced would the state and civil society be forced to consider harsh choices and reforms like the South African state did in the late 1980s.

No doubt the far right would increase their demands for ethnic cleansing, but if this came at the cost of complete financial and political isolation then it would have the effect of polarising political sentiment inside Israel’s Jewish population, which is itself a pre-condition for rupturing the cross-class bloc that underpins Zionist cohesion at home and abroad.

It would open up the way for a progressive polarisation between classes inside Israel. A growing rift could be engineered between non-settlers and other Jewish Israeli citizens who could see their stability and prosperity was threatened by the actions and demands of 400,000 settlers, a small minority of Israel’s 5.26 million Jewish citizens.

state solution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict increasingly can only be realised as a reactionary nightmare based on mass forced population transfers and ethnic cleansing. Naturally, this would “solve” nothing, not the demand for Palestinian refugee rights to return, nor for a meaningful sovereign state free of Israel domination and control. Indeed it would create more injustice and instability and prepare the way for further wars.

The Oslo accords

An important milestone in this process of disillusionment in the viability of the two-state solution within the Palestinian movement was, paradoxically, the decision of the Arafat leadership of the PLO to sign the Oslo declaration of principles in 1993 with Israel. This came after a mass revolt of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation – the first Intifada of 1987-93. The Oslo accords were meant to lead to the Palestinians having their own state living side by side in harmony with Israel. But it did the opposite.

At Oslo Arafat agreed to Israel’s redeployment of its occupying troops to those parts of the West Bank and Gaza that allowed it to defend Jewish settlements and secure the natural resources and roads that enabled them to function. Around 59% of the West Bank was put officially under Israeli civil and security control. Another 23% was placed under Palestinian civil control, but Israeli security control. Barely 18% of the territory was to be governed by the Palestinian National Authority. 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 future negotiations during the “interim period”. The negotiations on the “final settlement” were meant to be concluded in 1996 but were repeatedly delayed.

One Palestinian academic has summed up what Oslo was about: “Israel would be able to continue building and expanding settlements, open its markets, have free access to Arab countries, normalise its relations with countries like India and Pakistan, and yet make sure that Palestinians were isolated in ever-shrinking areas of dense population without any real say in the affairs of the country. For this the Palestinians would be able to fly their flag in

CAMPAIGNING FOR A BOYCOTT

Boycott Veolia Environnement

VEOLIA ENVIRONNEMENT is a French multinational whose name may be familiar to people in the UK because of its subsidiaries here. Veolia Transport is a leading partner in the CityPass consortium, contracted to build a light rail tramway system linking west Jerusalem to illegal Jewish settlements such as Pisgat Ze’ev, French Hill, Neve Ya’akov and Gilo in occupied East Jerusalem. The railway links Jewish areas to Jewish settlements, not stopping in Palestinian areas: it is part of the apartheid like deliberate separation of the two communities.

The complete light rail system is due for completion in 2020, with Veolia responsible for the operation. The first line will open in 2010. With its involvement in this project, the company is directly implicated in the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and is playing a key role in Israel’s attempt to make its annexation of the Palestinian territory of east Jerusalem irreversible.

Campaigners in the Palestine

Solidarity and Boycott Israeli Goods campaigns (www.bigcampaign.org) argue that through Veolia Transport’s participation in this, the whole Veolia Group, including its British subsidiaries, are implicated in facilitating Israel’s violation of Articles 49 and 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In November 2006, ASN, a Dutch bank, broke off financial relations with Veolia on account of the light rail contract. Veolia also runs Luas, Dublin’s light rail system, but has been forced by trade union pressure in Ireland to cancel a proposed deal to train drivers and engineers for the Jerusalem light rail. In 2007 the PLO, in conjunction with AFPS, a French NGO, started court cases in France against Veolia Transport and Alstom, another CityPass partner, to get their contract for the tramway invalidated on the grounds that its aim breached the French Civil Code.

In Britain Veolia Environmental Services runs waste collection and recycling for several local

authorities in the UK and provides a local target for action. It is clear from the parent company’s annual reports that the company is one coherent whole and so the misconduct of one division is the misconduct of Veolia as a whole and all divisions and subsidiaries are implicated. Veolia Water and Veolia Transport are also UK subsidiaries.

Palestine Solidarity Branches (PSC) branches and other campaigners in Lambeth, Camden, Portsmouth, Hampshire, and Southampton have been putting pressure on local councils not to contract with Veolia. Portsmouth campaigners have written to John Gummer, former Tory minister and now Chairman of Veolia Water UK. Gummer replied, concluding “Veolia Environnement will continue to look closely at the issues surrounding this matter.”

Campaigners in South Yorkshire are considering a legal challenge to the renewal of the Rotherham bus route contract the company holds. Trade unionists in councils and transport services should raise this issue through their branches, many of which will be affiliated nationally or locally to the PSC.

a statelet and run their own vassal state (which would resemble a large prison)."²⁹

In July 2000 attempts at a final settlement between the PLO and Israel's Prime Minister Barak, under the pressure of US president Clinton, 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. The uprising was brutally suppressed after March 2002 with the destruction of several West Bank towns. This was possible because of the support of President Bush, who assimilated the struggle against Hamas and dissident Palestinian groups into his "war on terror" after 9/11.

Repeated repression by Israel of justified Palestinian resistance – mass arrests and detention, assassinations and torture, together with the steady theft and settlement of land has led more and more Palestinian people to accept that the two-state solution is a dead end, or rather an Israeli ploy to steal Palestinian resources while herding Palestinians themselves into an open air prison with the fig-leaf of sovereignty. More and more Palestinians are coming to accept that 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.³⁰

What we have now is in fact, de facto, the two states solution – one that is compatible with the existence of the state of Israel as an exclusively Jewish state. It is a state, which, because of the nature of Zionism, must seek to expand its territories at the expense of the Palestinians and to "purify" the composition of its citizens inside its pre-1967 borders by threatening to remove the rights of

Today an Argentine Jew who has never been to Israel can become a citizen while Palestinian refugees expelled from Jaffa and their descendants cannot

Arab Israelis or even forcibly transfer them out of Israel. In other words, the two-state solution can only ever be realised as a reactionary, unstable nightmare.³¹ Indeed in the current climate a Palestinian state – set up unilaterally or not – would be a green light for the ethnic cleansers to expel as many Israeli Arabs as possible into this "state".

In the imagination of some leftists the two-states solution could entail the creation of a non-Zionist (that is non-exclusively Jewish) state on one side. But what would be the point, as there would be no rationale for two states at all,

no need to establish territorial boundaries between Jews and non-Jews living alongside each other in the historic region of Palestine? Freedom of religious worship and cultural autonomy for Jews, Christians and Muslims, does not require separate states. Only privileges and exclusive rights for one racial or ethnic group demand this.

A single, secular multi-national state

The idea of a single state in which Jews and Palestinians could cohabit is not new within the Palestinian movement. Indeed, as the trauma of the 1947-48 nakba eased over subsequent decades, the debate within the Palestinian liberation movement gradually moved towards an acceptance of this goal. The Palestinian leaders realised they needed to outline a vision that could appeal to sections of the Jewish population resident in what was Palestine, since they were there to stay.

As one leader of Fatah said in 1969:

"There is a large Jewish population in Palestine and it has grown considerably in the last twenty years. We recognise it has the right to live there and that it is part of the Palestinian people. We reject the formulae that the Jews must be driven into the sea. If we are fighting a Jewish state of a racial kind, which had driven the Arabs out of their lands, it is not so as to replace it with an Arab state which in turn would drive out the Jews. What we want to create in the historical borders of Palestine is a multi-racial democratic state . . . a state without any hegemony, in which everyone, Jew, Christian or Muslim will enjoy full civic rights."³²

While this was a progressive goal, it was tied to a strategy of guerrilla war against the Israeli state which was doomed to be ineffective against a Zionist state which was far superior as a military power and had the financial and military backing of the US. Moreover such a purely military struggle, divorced from a struggle for a socialist state of Palestine, had no chance of involving or attracting Jewish progressive working class forces in Israel, other than as support auxiliaries for the Palestinian guerrillas or human rights activists. Nationalist guerrillism could not hope to mobilise the substantial minority of Jewish working class forces needed to crack the repressive power of the Zionists state machine.

Over the next two decades the failures of this Fatah strategy led to growing demoralisation, corruption and political retreat towards an acceptance of partition into two states, under pressure from Israel and its international supporters. It also led to the disillusionment of broad Palestinian forces in secular nationalism and allowed the growth of the influence of religious forces, in particular Hamas. Failure and defeat allowed Israel and the US to pressure Arafat to accept the permanence of the Zionist state and to sign up for the two-state solution, as the best they could hope for. It has take 30 years for this dream to be shown to be a chimera.

By 2004 support once again for this goal of a single, secular state was being articulated from within the PLO itself. Legal advisor Michael Tarazi said:

"After years of negotiations, coupled with incessant building of settlements and now the construction of the

wall, Palestinians finally understand that Israel is offering 'independence' on a reservation stripped of water and arable soil, economically dependent on Israel and even lacking the right to self-defence.

"As a result, many Palestinians are contemplating whether the quest for equal statehood should now be superseded by a struggle for equal citizenship. In other words, a one-state solution in which citizens of all faiths and ethnicities live together as equals. Recent polls indicate that a quarter of Palestinians favour the secular one-state solution – a surprisingly high number given that it is not officially advocated by any senior Palestinian leader."³³

Some might argue that this undermines the Palestinian national struggle, seen as the struggle for a separate state. But Marxists are not nationalists; rather we fight national oppression and support the right of oppressed nations to self-determination. How the Palestinians choose to "self-determine" can and does fluctuate according to the experience of their oppression. The preservation and expression of a national identity can take the form of statehood or be content with a high degree of political or cultural autonomy.

One Palestinian has noted:

"To many diaspora Palestinians, the whole idea of nationalism as it emerged with post-World War two decolonisation has lost its lustre, since nation states in Africa and the Middle East have largely failed to deliver the prosperity and freedom they promised . . . Furthermore, the collective experience of diaspora Palestinians in recent decades has been transnational rather than national. We have become used to being Palestinian and Canadian, Palestinian and Colombian, Palestinian and Jordanian . . . Long accustomed to transience and movement, diaspora Palestinians no longer necessarily feel the need for a unidimensional identity, embodied by a homogenised, nationalist state."³⁴

A single state would have to deal with the intractable issues of settlements and the right of Palestinian refugees (and their descendents) to return to the land and the homes (where they still exist) from which they were expelled. Indeed the right of refugees to return and the settlements issue are intertwined. Today the Jewish West Bank settlements, especially in the north are turning into considerable conurbations. In addition to the land taken up with housing units, schools, medical centres, the "security buffer" of roads and land surrounding settlements that are off-limits to West Bank Palestinians, takes up further huge swathes of territory.

Meanwhile, 4.2 million Palestinian refugees were registered with UNRWA in 2005 – 800,000 in the West Bank, 1 million in the Gaza Strip and 2.6 million in the surrounding states. These must be allowed to return if they wish and the exclusive Jewish law of the right to return ended. Today an Argentine Jew who has never been to Israel can become a citizen while Palestinian refugees expelled from Jaffa and their descendants cannot.

The key issue for any secular, multi-national state is not the physical removal or destruction of established settlements, although this may prove necessary to accommodate the rights of Palestinians returning. What is crucial is the

desegregation of the settlements, so that Palestinians can take up residency in the area. Moreover, all the financial inducements and subsidies available to Jewish settlers must be ended, while Palestinians seeking to return are given all the assistance necessary (including job creation) to re-start their lives.

Naturally, should Palestinians choose not to exercise their right to return then agreed compensation should be given. But one study shows that 90% of former Palestinian

A working class unity among Jews and Arabs could be strong enough to crush the far right and break-up the Zionist state which nurtures them

village sites are no longer occupied and only 1.5% of Israelis live today in areas where a majority of expelled Palestinians originated. While clashes over property claims are inevitable these could be settled under a socialist, workers' and small farmers' government.

It is not difficult to envisage a secular, multi-national state which guarantees equal civil and political rights for all ethnic groups, underwriting respect for different religious and cultural traditions; degrees of autonomy in education, religion and language. In all these areas it will require an enormous uplift of resources aimed at overcoming the systematic inequality in jobs and education experienced by the Palestinians – including Arab Israeli citizens.

While an increasing number of Palestinians are recognising the need for a one-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, some underestimate the difficulty in bringing it about. Ali Abuminah, for example, believes that increasing numbers of Israelis and Palestinians will come to realise that since time has run out on the two-state solution they need to embrace this goal. He even believes that such a solution is compatible with Zionism:

"For Israeli Jews the key goals of Zionism would be realised. If not a monopoly on power, they would have a permanent, protected, and vibrant national presence in all of Israel-Palestine, as partners and equals, not as occupiers."³⁵

He ignores the fact that Zionism is specifically about the monopolisation of power for Jews in Israel; Zionism's key goals would not be realised in a secular, multi-national state but destroyed in this process. Hence Abuminah underestimates the obstructions and struggle involved in removing the power of the state that underwrites the privileges and the class alliance upon which Zionism rests.

What is needed is not a simple, naïve electoral coalition that puts the case for a de-Zionised Israel to the people, but a class and national struggle that fractures the cross-class unity upon which the Zionist project is built. Inside Israel, Palestinians and progressive anti-Zionist Israelis have to jointly pursue a strategy that puts mass, direct actions (strikes, land occupations, demonstrations, self-defence)

at the centre of the fight for democratic and national rights; that seeks to expel Israeli troops and installations from the occupied territories; that seeks to desegregate all Jewish settlements and that fights to end the racist laws inside Israel.

Such a strategy that does not seek “to drive Jews into the sea” but dismantles Zionist structures, holds out a chance of appealing to broader Jewish working class forces as the crisis of Israeli society deepens. But this crisis will not lead to the peaceful dismantling of Zionism; rather Israeli society will polarise between deepest reaction (“expel all disloyal Israeli Arabs”, “annex all the lands between the Jordan and the sea”) and progressive forces which recognise that peace and stability is only compatible with justice for the Palestinians.

A working class unity among Jews and Arabs could be strong enough to marginalise and crush the far right

racists and break-up the Zionist state apparatus which nurtures them. Such an alliance would not stop at simply extending democratic rights to Palestinians but would push on to destroy the capitalist foundations of oppression and exploitation. This way the revolution against Zionism could be made permanent by overthrowing private property relations and allowing for the conflicting claims of Palestinians and Jews over land and businesses to be reconciled within the context of socialised property and desegregated communities.

And such a perspective could not be confined to Palestine, it would have to be combined with a mighty workers’ and peasants’ struggle to rid the region of its reactionary dictatorships – in Egypt, Syria, Jordan and other states, a struggle that would bring the Arab, Palestinian and Jewish masses together in a struggle for a socialist and democratic Middle East.

ENDNOTES

1. UN Security Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP), October 1947
2. The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, Ilan Pappé 2006, pxiix
3. Amnesty International statement, 23 March 2005
4. www.moledet.org.il/english/
5. Financial Times, 21 January 2009
6. UN Security Council Resolution 465 (of 1 March 1980) called on Israel “... to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.”
7. There are an additional 100 or so unrecognised settlements, referred to in the media as outposts.
8. M B Qumsiyeh, Sharing the Land of Canaan, Pluto 2004 p134
9. The Guardian, 18 October 2005
10. Quoted in Where now for Palestine? The demise of the two state solution, Edited by Jamil Hilal, Zed 2007 p127
11. www.btselem.org/English/Separation_Barrier/
12. The International Court of Justice, in its Advisory Opinion of July 2004, declared that the construction of the fence/wall inside the West Bank is illegal under international law and called for it to be dismantled.
13. Ali Abunimah One country, Metropolitan Books 2006, p32
14. B’Tselem says: “The restrictions on movement that Israel has imposed on the Palestinian population in the Occupied Territories over the past five years are unprecedented in the history of the Israeli occupation in their scope, duration, and in the severity of damage that the cause.” www.btselem.org/English/Freedom_of_Movement/
15. New York Times, 3 February 2009
16. Abunimah op cit p28
17. Financial Times, op cit
18. New York Times, 24 January 2009
19. www.btselem.org/English/Settlements/

20. E W Said, “Breaking the deadlock; a third way”, in End of the Peace Process, 2002 p284
21. Quoted in Hilal op cit, p12
22. In 2003 the Knesset passed a racist law to bar Palestinians from the occupied territories emigrating to Israel after marrying an Israeli citizen, again in order to keep the number of Arabs down.
23. Forward, 26 December 2003
24. Abunimah, op cit, p58. A year after the withdrawal from Gaza a UN inspection revealed that the main Gaza-Israel crossing for goods had been closed for more than 60% of the time compared to 20% in 2004-05.
25. Ibid, p85
26. Ibid
27. Ibid, p87
28. Twenty years ago, Kahn, the racist leader of Shas was banned from the Knesset for proposing such a vision for the region. Now Lieberman is feted and courted; his proposal for a loyalty oath for Arabs getting nods of approval from Likud.
29. Qumsiyeh op cit p134
30. In fact polls this decade have shown that Palestinian support for a two-state solution has hovered between one third and one half for some time while that for one state registers between one quarter and one third.
31. Poll after poll of Israelis say 60-70% want a separate Palestinian state and end to settlements; but only 35% agree to return to 1967 border or agree to all or most settlements going. Most Israelis do not consider the biggest established settlements as settlements at all, but rather only the outposts. The most any peace plan by Israelis have agreed to is 20% of settlers leaving, which is unacceptable to Palestinians.
32. Abunimah op cit p108
33. New York Times, 4 October 2004
34. Abunimah op cit p170
35. Ibid