

Palestine: Hamas pre-empted US inspired coup

THE ELECTION victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections in early 2006 shocked politicians in Washington and the European Union. Here was an Islamist movement, an ally of Iran, taking power in the West Bank and Gaza Strip after winning free and fair elections. Worse, it was a movement that formally rejected the Oslo Peace agreements and refused to recognise Israel, a state formed in 1948 by ethnically cleansing Palestinians from their homeland. Hamas rejected the idea of “two states” living side by side, a solution favoured by the west.

The US, leading the so-called Quartet (Russia, US, EU and the UN), was determined to reverse this election victory by fair means or foul. An immediate boycott of the Palestinian Authority (PA) was introduced, cutting off aid and support to the occupied territories. The Quartet believed that, by starving the PA of funds to pay the wages of public sector workers and teachers, they could undermine the government’s support.

A banking embargo was enforced on the PA, forcing the government to rely on suitcases full of banknotes brought over the border from Egypt. Israel refused to hand over tens of millions dollars of tax revenues that belonged to the PA, and closed most entry points for goods and people.

This economic blockade caused a catastrophic fall in the territory’s GDP and widespread collapse of businesses. Israel stepped up its constant military attacks and targeted assassinations, and followed up with large-scale arrests of elected Hamas officials, including members of the Palestinian parliament. The imperialist blockade has had a devastating effect on the people of Palestine. GDP has collapsed by nearly one-third in the last 18 months. Palestinians are forced to exist on handouts and sell possessions to survive. Malnutrition of almost sub-Saharan Africa proportions has appeared amongst children. Yet still the Hamas-led government did not collapse.

Imperialism’s most important ally in the territory was now the military organisation of Fatah – the party that had been thrown out of government in the 2006 elections because of its incompetence and corruption and because, despite its slavish adherence to the Oslo Accords, it had delivered nothing to the Palestinian people.

This failure left the President Mahmoud Abbas, elected in early 2005 in an election boycotted by Hamas, completely isolated – except for his continued support by the imperialists. Abbas was their favoured candidate in 2005. His job was to control the militias and try to broker a ceasefire with Israel and a peace deal based on “two states”. Israel made sure that such a peace deal was never on the table. A viable Palestinian state is the last thing they want. Their aim is a crushed and fragmented Palestinian set of cantons.

In the last few months the US had stepped up plans to provide Abbas with the military muscle to deal with Hamas’ armed wing when the time was ripe to dismiss the government. The Presidential Guard, a force of some 15,000, was being armed and trained by US special forces and the CIA. A further \$1.27 bn was being allocated to raise another seven “special battalions”.

Hamas had attempted to compromise. It agreed to Mecca to a Saudi Arabian brokered “unity government”, giving up ministries to independents and Fatah, though retaining the premiership. While refusing to abandon its long held position of non-recognition of Israel, it offered an indeterminate “long term truce” in return for Israel withdrawing from the territories it had occupied for forty years after the 1967 war.

Undoubtedly, given pressure over time, Hamas would have followed the electoral route of the IRA in Northern Ireland and bent the knee to imperialism’s demands, accepting some sort of two state perspective. But it was not given the chance.

By June this year it was clear that Mohammed Dahlan, the Fatah strongman and head of Preventative Security Forces, was organising for a showdown, refusing to take orders from the newly appointed independent Interior Minister. Hamas decided to strike first. The ease with which Hamas defeated Fatah’s forces shows how little support they really had amongst the population of Gaza.

Since then the imperialists have been running fast to save what they can from the mess. Backed by the US, Abbas launched a counter-coup from the West Bank, dismissing the government and appointing a new “emergency one” headed by Salam Fayad, an ex-World Bank official. At the same time he used Fatah forces to impose a reign of terror over the West Bank. In Ramallah, and at the Hamas controlled city council in Nablus, institutions have been closed down and Hamas members kidnapped. The Hamas Deputy Speaker of parliament narrowly escaped being taken as Fatah militia seized the building.

Since the sacking of the government, Israel and the Quartet have been falling over themselves to lift the blockade they imposed on the PA. Ehad Olmert, the Israeli prime minister, declared the new government a “credible and serious administration”, a description that certainly could not be used to describe his own government. Bush declared Salam Fayad a “jolly good fellow” and immediately announced new aid packages for the West Bank.

It has yet to be seen how the imperialists will get around the awkward democratic fact that the new government has to be endorsed by a two-thirds majority in the PA parliament within thirty days, a parliament dominated by Hamas. In fact so little support has the new prime minister

that his party list achieved only 2.5% in the last election; but such niceties will not stop the US and Europe from declaring it the legitimate “government”.

Israel is taking these events as yet another opportunity to fragment and destroy any Palestinian entity. The Interior minister already talks about the “collapse” of the PA and the need to put Israeli forces on the Egypt-Gaza border to seal off Hamas in what they now call a “terror entity”.

The economic blockade continues but now it focuses on the 1.5 million people in Gaza. It is the duty of socialists and trade unionists everywhere to fight to get the blockade lifted and to aid the Palestinians fighting for their land and rights. The attempt by Abbas and the imperialists to annul the 2006 elections should be condemned – the Palestinians have the right to elect a government of their own choosing.

The recent events, and the de facto break up of the PA, has proved once again the bankruptcy of the Oslo Peace Accords and the idea that Israel will ever tolerate anything

resembling a real state for the Palestinians. The “two state solution” is dead in the water.

As socialists we have nothing in common with the Islamic fundamentalism of Hamas. The imposition of an “Islamic statelet” on the people of Gaza will not take forward the Palestinian struggle one iota. The permeation of the state and civil institutions with reactionary religious dogma will erode democratic rights, especially for women.

Palestinians urgently need to build a revolutionary socialist movement throughout Palestine, one that fights for a bi-national, socialist republic of Jews and Arabs – a Palestinian workers’ state. To get it means widening the struggle beyond the borders of Palestine, winning over the masses in Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the rest of the Middle East to a revolutionary socialist perspective by a consistent struggle both against the reactionary ideology of Zionism and fundamentalist Islam. Forward to a socialist federation of the Middle East!

G8: more broken promises

THE ANNUAL G8 summit is an opportunity for the leaders of the richest nations in the world to wear their hearts on their sleeves. The media are primed to expect great progress in solving the big issues of the day – climate change, AIDS, third world poverty.

By all measures then, the Rostock summit was a resounding failure. The G8 leaders were resolutely vague as to when they would meet their 2005 Gleneagles commitment to increase aid by \$50bn by 2010. Having missed their targets on their “binding commitments” at Gleneagles they would only declare that they would “continue their efforts” to increase funding for AIDS treatment.

Abdoulaye Wade, President of Senegal, commented that his country had “not received one extra dollar in aid” since the Gleneagles pledge at the summit two years ago. Global aid actually fell last year from \$61bn in 2005 to \$56bn in 2006 and even then it was tied to the privatisation of state assets.

In 2005 there was a record number of privatisations in the countries of the global south, transferring \$90bn of resources to the corporations. So flagrant were the G8 leaders that even Bono condemned the G8 for “broken promises”, fretting that their failings would play into the hands of the anti-capitalist militants on the streets.

As a result of these broken promises millions of people will die. Since the Gleneagles summit, AIDS has killed nearly six million adults and children – the population of a country the size of Denmark.

In Kenya an estimated 1.3 million people are HIV-positive and more than half are women. Kenya has an external debt burden of \$6.8bn. Each year it pays \$364m in debt and just \$430m per year on health. But that’s not the end of it. In order to meet the demands of the IMF, the Kenyan government agreed to a budget deficit of just 1.5% of GDP and a freeze on employing new teachers. In

2005, 340,000 children could not be admitted to secondary school because of a shortage of places.

Sucking up to the rich clearly doesn’t work. Remember, Bob Geldof at Gleneagles gave the G8 “Ten out of ten on aid, eight out of ten on debt.” Ten thousand demonstrators blocking the entrances into the Rostock summit clearly thought differently.

So what about climate change?

Claude Mandil, executive director of the International Energy Agency, told the *Financial Times*: “It was very, very good progress. I’m very happy.” Speaking of the failure to agree to halve emissions by 2050, which was blocked by the US and Russia, he said: “Of course, there was a compromise but what was dropped was something that was not important.”

All the G8 really agreed to do was talk about climate change at another conference in December. The US suggested that China take some of the burden for reducing emissions, while Russia, one of the world’s largest exporters of gas and oil, wants nothing to do with limiting consumption. And indeed Russia’s growing assertiveness even meant that the G8 couldn’t pretend to agree on how to rule the world. Tony Blair remarked he was “worried and fearful about what is happening in Russia today and Russia’s external policies,” hinting at the effective expropriation of BP’s gas interests and Putin’s threat to point his missiles at the EU in retaliation for Poland and the Czech Republic providing bases for a new US missile warning system.

In early 2007 in an interview with the *Guardian*, Bono remarked that:

“It’s not just the credibility of the G8 that’s at stake, it’s the credibility of the largest non-violent protest in thirty years. Nobody wants to go back to what we saw in Genoa, but I do sense a real sense of jeopardy.”

Forward to Japan.