

COMMUNICATIONS

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Appraising the Middle East War

The war in the Middle East and its aftermath have raised anew some fundamental questions of principle within the broad people's movement not only in our country but also in Israel itself.

The *Worker* editorial of June 25 correctly points out that "emotionalism and national chauvinism have been substituted for sober appraisal of the realities of the situation within certain circles, including supporters of the Left." Hyman Lumer's analysis in the July issue of *Political Affairs* makes a much-needed objective and sober appraisal. He expresses a deep understanding of the people's concern for the fate of Israel but cautions against a nationalism that pits Jew against Arab, a national chauvinism that blinds people and reduces them to impotence in the struggle against the real enemy of the Israeli and Arab peoples.

Anti-Arab racism is a great obstacle to understanding the basic causes of the war. For racism is a terrible poison. It dims the power of reason, it denies the most elementary rights of man and justifies monstrous crimes. Hence the need to discuss publicly, on a principled basis, the nature of the Middle East war, the national liberation struggles of the Arab peo-

ples and the role of the Soviet Union in the Middle East. In this connection it is worth recalling Lenin's advice to the Russian delegation at the Hague Conference in 1922:

It must be explained to the people how great is the secrecy with which war arises and how helpless the ordinary workers' organizations are in the face of war . . . even those organizations that call themselves revolutionary. (*Selected Works*, International Publishers, New York, Vol. X, p. 316.)

Two diametrically opposed views persist on the nature of the war. One is that for Israel it was a war for its very existence, a defensive war. The other is that it was a war of aggression by Israel, planned, egged on and supported by imperialism, especially U.S. imperialism. The first view labels the Arab countries as aggressors whose leaders have more than once declared the liquidation of Israel as their aim. As evidence of aggression, those who hold this view cite the closing of the Gulf of Aqaba and the massing of Arab military forces on Israel's borders. The Mikunis-Sneh group in Israel declared on June 6:

After the battles which broke out between the Arab and the Israeli armies, the Communist Party decided its position in regard to the

military situation according to the political goals of the two sides: on the part of the United Arab Republic and other Arab governments this is a war to destroy the State of Israel and on the part of the Jewish people this is a war to preserve the existence, security and right of independence of the State of Israel. (*Morning Freiheit*, June 18, 1967.)

The *Morning Freiheit* has also characterized the war as one of self-defense. This position, I believe, is one lacking in objective analysis of the forces involved and marked by national chauvinism. But if some on the Left were caught in the avalanche of imperialist propaganda, the clear-headed forces for peace saw in the war the danger of a world war stemming from Israel's aggression. The correct position, in my opinion, was that presented by Gus Hall in *The Worker* of June 11. The basic causes, he wrote, are the same as in Vietnam and in Latin America. And while he branded as irresponsible the declarations of some Arab leaders calling for the destruction of Israel, he wrote:

The governments of the United States, Great Britain and Israel are lined up with the oil monopolies. The governments of the USA and Great Britain are direct representatives of the thieves and the present government of Israel is a willing accomplice and accessory.

In Israel the voices against aggression made themselves heard despite government repression, arrests and intimidation. On the day the war broke out, Mr. Vilner, member of the Knesset and

general secretary of the Communist Party, charged the Eshkol-Dayan-Begin clique with launching the war against Egypt. (*L'Humanité*, June 12.) On June 22, the Central Committee of that party assessed the causes and character of the war as follows:

The war which was started by the Eshkol-Dayan-Begin Government is an aggressive war, which was planned beforehand together with the governments of the USA and Britain and with the support of the West German government. (*The Worker*, June 16.)

Mikunis leans on Lenin to support his position. He says:

Lenin taught us to define our attitude towards a war according to the political aims of the belligerent parties. The political aims in the case of this war between the Pan-Arabic front and Israel were and remained very clear: on the part of the people of Israel it was and remains a war for its existence, for its life. (*Morning Freiheit*, July 2. Emphasis added.)

It is true that Lenin refers to the need for understanding the political aims of the belligerent parties to understand the character of wars. But this is not the whole story or the kernel of the question. Lenin said:

Marxists differ both from pacifists and anarchists in that we recognize the necessity of an historical study of each war individually, from the point of view of Marx's dialectical materialism. (*Collected Works: The Imperialist War*, International Publishers, New York, p. 219.)

He said further:

"War is politics continued by other (i.e., forcible) means" (Clausewitz). . . . Rightly, the Marxists have always considered this axiom as the theoretical foundation for their understanding of the meaning of every war. (*Ibid.*, p. 224.)

Even a superficial study of the historical events preceding the Middle East crisis shows that the general aim and historical direction in the Arab world is political and economic independence from imperialism. This is especially evident in the advanced countries of the UAR and Syria. It is the historic road resulting from the irreconcilable contradiction between the oppressed Arab peoples and their imperialist oppressors.

As with all liberation movements and revolutions, we must see their predominantly progressive features which must be supported, while we combat their secondary, negative aspects. The negative aspect of their nationalism, which expresses itself in this case in "destroying Israel," must particularly be rejected and combated.

On the other hand, the role of the Israeli ruling circles has been that of a tool of the imperialist powers. In addition, they have harbored expansionist designs of their own, as revealed by the outcome of the war of aggression. For many years, Israel has cast its vote in the UN against the independence of African and Asian countries. And within Israel the Arabs have been subjected to a racist oppression which extends also to the Sephardic Jews.

Israel's Aims

On May 17 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Syria, after noting U.S. imperialism's hatred of the progressive Syrian regime and the work of the CIA in Syria in cahoots with the Israeli leaders, states that "everything indicates that the aggressive American imperialist circles decided to rely in the first place on armed aggression through Israel's intermediacy." (*Nouvelle Critique*, June 1967.) This is corroborated by none other than Israel's General Yitshak Rabin, who declared on May 12: "As long as the ardent revolutionaries of Damascus are not overthrown, no government will feel secure in the Middle East." (*Ibid.*)

The Communist Party of Israel, in the statement referred to above, says:

The principal aim of the war was to bring about the fall of the anti-imperialist regimes in Egypt and Syria, to sever the connections of the Arab countries with the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries, and to protect the concessions of the foreign oil monopolies and the strategic bases of the Western colonial powers in our region.

Mikunis, however, delivered a blistering attack on Vilner in the Knesset, in which he said:

. . . that Israel has worked in conjunction with imperialism is only a falsification, a conscious deception. The whole world knows that the war broke out against the will of America, England and France, and that it was a just struggle for the existence of the State of Israel. (*Morning Freiheit*, July 7.)

Arguments are widespread that the danger of "liquidating Israel" was so serious and imminent that the Eshkol clique was compelled to wage a "preventive war." The *Morning Freiheit* of June 22 advanced this analogy: "Is Israel an aggressor when she adopts measures to insure that she should not find herself in the same position as did the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941?"

But this is only an apology for the imperialists and for the Israeli aggression. It falsely compares the Arabs with Nazi invaders. While the declarations of "liquidation of Israel" are frankly irresponsible and contrary to the anti-imperialist character and aims of the Arab liberation movement, they have also been grossly exaggerated, distorted and often taken out of context.

The "blitzkrieg" conclusively proved that the war was not "preventive" on Israel's part. Israeli leaders have always flattered themselves on their knowledge of their adversaries' plans. If so, they surely knew that the Arab countries involved lacked the means to wage such a war.

The imperialist war plan was also revealed by *Figaro's* special correspondent in Israel, who relates that the Israeli newspapers had prepared in advance the headline "Egypt Attacks Israel" for the morning issue of June 5.

The ugly hand of the CIA was revealed in the arrest of two Syrian mercenaries, Hatoum and Jamaa, at the height of the war. These agents confessed that the U.S. was to play the main role in

the plot to liquidate the government of Syria.

Arab Liberation

Part of the campaign to win the minds of Americans is the unabated appeal to anti-Arab chauvinism. We are told again and again of the "backwardness" and "primitiveness" of the Arabs. But an objective understanding, free of anti-Arab chauvinism, of the mounting liberation struggles of the Arab peoples can help us to see the causes of the Middle East crisis.

The anti-colonial liberation movement, following the victory over the Nazis, swept the continent of Asia and Africa. The Arab world is part of it, delivering hard blows against imperialist interests. In 1952 the anti-imperialist revolution in Egypt opened a new chapter. There followed the downfall of the reactionary governments of Syria in 1954 and Iraq in 1958. In Yemen, since 1962 a struggle has gone on between pro-imperialist and republican forces. And in Syria, after long and painful years of advances and setbacks, in February 1966 there came into power a progressive, anti-imperialist regime under whose leadership more than 80 per cent of industry has been nationalized.

The imperialist powers are bent on reversing this onward march. It is in this light that we must see the attack of Britain, France and Israel on Egypt in 1956, the sending of U.S. troops into Lebanon in 1958 and the present Israeli aggression.

The UAR, which has become the bulwark of the Arab liberation front, has acquired, despite contradictory currents, a clearly defined progressive and revolutionary character. It has gone through three stages of development: the period of national independence, 1952-1956; the eradication of the last vestiges of imperialism within the country, 1957-1961; and the present period of "social conversion." There has been a process of overcoming both objective difficulties and unscientific ideology, including that of Nasser.

In 1962 the UAR adopted a Charter of National Action, with Nasser as one of the leading architects. Important reforms have been introduced, including the occupation by workers and peasants of important posts in management and on all elective bodies. The Charter indicates the new orientation towards socialism:

The socialist solution of economic and social underdevelopment in Egypt and the revolutionary approach to progress was not a hypothesis based on free choice; the socialist solution was a historic inevitability imposed by reality and by the hopes of the masses as well as the changing nature of the world in the second half of the twentieth century. (*African Communist*, No. 27, 1966.)

The Nature of Arab Nationalism

Arab nationalism has a double character: local nationalism in each country, the content of which is political and economic liberation; and the nationalism that as-

pires toward the reconstruction of Arab unity in the struggle against imperialism, for peace and peaceful coexistence. Both aspects develop in an unremitting struggle between the forces of imperialist-feudal-bourgeois society and the forces of revolutionary development.

The question is often asked: how do you explain a united Arab front including both anti-imperialist elements (the UAR and Syria) and reactionary feudal rulers like Feisal in Saudi Arabia and Hussein in Jordan? How can such a united front be called anti-imperialist?

The character of a national movement, however, must be judged not abstractly but in terms of its relation to the general interests of the world revolutionary movement. Arab unity today plays *objectively* an anti-imperialist role, even though it includes countries headed by reactionary monarchs. This point was expressed by Stalin in his *Foundation of Leninism*, written in 1924:

The revolutionary character of a national movement in the conditions of imperialist oppression does not necessarily presuppose the existence of a revolutionary or republican program of the movement. The struggle the Emir of Afghanistan is waging for the independence of his country is objectively a *revolutionary* struggle despite the monarchist Emir and his entourage, for it weakens, disintegrates and undermines imperialism. . . . For the same reason, the struggle the Egyptian merchants and bourgeois intellectuals are waging for the independence of their country is objectively *revolutionary*

despite the bourgeois origin and bourgeois calling of the leaders of the Egyptian national movement and despite the fact that they are opposed to socialism. (*Leninism*, International Publishers, New York, Vol. I, pp. 67-68.)

It is within the broad anti-imperialist unity that the revolutionary elements carry on their struggles against the feudal and pro-imperialist rulers. Arab Communists, in an exchange of views (*World Marxist Review*, September 1964), asserted that Israel is a threat to the independent Arab states because of its aggressive policy, but at the same time they categorically opposed all calls for "driving Israel into the sea," saying:

Clearly, this is an unprincipled position. In effect, it is the position of the Arab bourgeoisie and the Arab nationalists. They suggest no concrete solution that would satisfy either the Arab peoples or the peoples of Israel, who are faced with the same enemy—the Arab and Israeli reactionaries in the service of imperialism.

Thus both the Arab Communists and the Israeli Communists headed by Vilner and Toubi adhere to the principles of proletarian internationalism, an integral part of which is to work for the defeat of the pro-imperialist, reactionary forces in one's own country as a condition for freedom and progress in the Middle East.