# FROM THE SECOND INTIFADA TO OCTOBER 7TH

## Class relations and aspects of the social struggle in Palestine-Israel

Deserters of Capitalist Peace & Comrades

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*The brochure **From the Second Intifada to October 7, Class Relations & Aspects of Social Conflict in Palestine-Israel** was released in September 2025 in five hundred copies by the **Deserters of Capitalist Peace and Comrades**.*


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# PREFACE

By February 2025 the continuous bombardment had already cost the lives of thousands of Palestinian civilians, had flattened the greatest part of the Gaza Strip and had led to extensive damage to basic infrastructure, with hospitals and the electricity grid almost 90% destroyed. Considering that the conflict taking place inside the Israel-Palestine capitalist formation is undoubtedly connected to a geographically wider, acute war situation which is developing simultaneously in different places (see the Russian–Ukrainian front, Sudan, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, Iran), we began at that time a series of discussions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, part of which is reflected in this publication.

Our primary reference was initially the article *"Behind the 21st Century Intifada"* which was originally published in the British magazine Aufheben #10 (2002) and then translated and introduced to the greek anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu (along with a preface and two appendices by the publishers) by "Kokkino Nima" and "Anares" journal in 2005. According to Aufheben's self-introduction, the Aufheben journal was published approximately every year from 1992 [to 2020], and its topics range from the analysis of the movement against road construction in England in the 1990s, to the critique of the anti-globalization and anti-war movements. We were also inspired by the two interviews with Emilio Minasian which are included in this publication as an appendix: see *"Gaza: An Extreme Militarization of Class War in Israel-Palestine"* (2023) and *"Palestine: People or Class?" parts I and II* (2024). Emilio Minasian approached the conflict by distancing himself from the nation-centric discussions that immediately began to dominate the public sphere and the analyses of the left and the anti-authoritarian movement. Having already read and discussed his first interview, which was published on the blog *Le Serpent de Mer* and translated into Greek in November 2023, we translated the second interview, that was published in two parts in the journal Courant Alternatif in 2024-25, ourselves. Emilio Minasian is a member of the publishing collective *Niet!* and the blog *Le Serpent de Mer*, both of which deal with *Critical* (social) *Theory*. He spent several periods in refugee camps in the West Bank between 2004 and 2023, conducting research.

In the conjuncture of the wars of the past three years —Ukraine, Palestine and the more general military conflicts in the Middle East (Syria-Iran-Lebanon-Yemen)—, we have chosen to bring the **proletarian-internationalist position** against war back to the forefront. After all, given that Israel-Palestine constitutes a single capitalist formation, its social developments and dynamics, despite any huge qualitative differences, are essentially shaped by class struggle, just like here or in other corners of the world. This is one of the main reasons why we are turning our attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The distinction between "aggressors" and "victims" —between "oppressor and oppressed nations"— is widely used by the left wing of capital and, unfortunately, by large sections of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu to call on the proletariat to support the war, and specifically one side of it: the one waging the national struggle in the name of the oppressed populations, amid an imperialist war. The distinct class interests are concealed and replaced by the interests of the "people" and the general interests of the "oppressed nation". It is our unshakeable conviction that the cross-class alliances required for the realization of the "national liberation ideal" kill class revolts and lead to anything but liberation from the material conditions of capitalist society and state barbarism. Thus, in the geopolitical, "anti-imperialist", nation-centric Leninist analyses of the supporters of "the arms of the resistance" that dominate the (libertarian) left milieu in Greece, we do not see anything but a reflection of Palestinian nationalism. Our hearts are with the proletarians in Palestine who are trying to save their lives and their families from the horrors of war, whether they are waging a social struggle or simply using every means at their disposal against the barbaric attack they are facing, and **we stand with them**. Our criticism here is directed at the Western enthusiasts of nationalist narratives, those who consistently stand with Palestine but not with the Palestinians, the ones conveniently and heedlessly labelled "national heroes" when in reality they are struggling to survive and escape the grinding jaws of the Israeli-Hamas war.

In this edition, we choose to focus on October 7 not as a "terrorist act," nor as an "act of resistance" by the Palestinian guerrillas, but primarily as a **militarized externalization of the class conflicts** that permeate the societies of both warring sides. Our goal was to understand how we got to October 7, viewing it as a culmination of historical events which, in order to be understood, require a narrative that goes back in time and deals with the internal contradictions of Israeli/Palestinian society and not simply imperialist conflicts. One issue that particularly concerned us is the triumph of politico-military formations—detached from social struggles—over class struggle: on the one hand, the military wing of Hamas and, on the other, the Israeli military forces, together create a nationalist bounded field, a restrictive cordon around the working classes, which they try to influence and keep on the sidelines. This publication brings the **historical context** and the **centrality of class struggle** back to the forefront.

Thus follows our choice to turn our gaze inward and look inside the societies of Gaza and the West Bank, but also Israel. After all, the history of class struggles around the world has shown that the struggle of the proletariat within the borders of national-capitalist formations that wage wars can be a decisive factor in ending them. It is also well known that this fundamental internationalist principle has been thrown into the trash can by anti-imperialists of all stripes, for decades. However, in the present situation, we are witnessing the emergence of a neo-anticolonial discourse that is in fact a rehash of the Maoist Third-Worldist policies that arose from the movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the political milieu of Greece, even groups that had previously developed significant anti-militarist action retreated in the face of the militarization of the social question in Israel-Palestine and embraced the view that "ultimately" it is possible to have military resistance “from below” when it comes to such a noble cause as the liberation of Palestinian land from the yoke of the Israeli "occupier."

But which of the supporters of the Palestinian struggle looks inside the Israeli camp? The analyses we encounter deal exclusively with *what the state of Israel is doing to the Palestinians*, while treating Israeli society as a monolithic society, and indeed as fascist, without asking the question **"What is going on with class relations within Israeli society itself?"** Who is working, who is thrown into unemployment, who lives in containers in construction sites, who refuses to enlist

and hates the army, who is resisting and creating rifts with their struggles? Without these rifts, the analysis remains an empty form that ignores the core of capitalist contradiction.

Judging that most of the theoretical approaches we read seem to comprise little more than emotionally charged nation-centric narratives, we felt the need to highlight our own methodological framework for interpreting the current situation and to examine Israel as a capitalist model-state that historically manages to ensure accumulation through **crises** and alternating **models of managing the proletariat.** If the first part of the publication undertakes such an anti-theoretical task, consciously choosing to avoid the post-colonial approaches like the plague, in the second part we seek to shed light, through a more historical lens, on the formation of apartheid in Gaza and the West Bank and the neoliberalization of Israel, as two sides of the same coin. This second part analyzes one of the most important socio-political crises Israel ever experienced, that of 2023, which lasted for months until October 7. In the third part, we highlight the resistance movements that have emerged in Israel and Palestine and the scattered moments in which they come together, and in closing, we chose to critically analyze the various views circulated in the marketplace of ideas from the left and beyond [in Greece].

The case of South Africa (Appendix II) highlights the class basis of the apartheid regime in South Africa and the fact that despite its mainstream interpretation as the original example of 'genuine' apartheid, its form was determined entirely by the needs and contradictions of capitalist accumulation, not as a deviation from it. After the official end of apartheid (1994), what changed was not the essence of capitalist domination, but the form it took. This confirms that divisions and stratification within the working class can reappear and be maintained not through explicitly racist laws, but through the divisions imposed by the capital relation itself. The legal regime of racial segregation is lifted, but the material conditions of exclusion, unemployment, violence, and class hierarchies remain, and are indeed deepened under the conditions of neoliberal capitalist restructuring.

For two years now, in the narratives reproduced around us, the conflict between labour and capital has been completely sidelined. Far from being the field of struggle, the categories of the people and the nation are the bearers of its fatal defeat. October 7th encapsulates a long process of militarization of the social question and the crisis of reproduction of capitalist relations which culminated in violent military externalization. If we want to break out of this cycle, we need to return to certain concepts that have been abandoned: class, surplus value, stratification, discipline, proletarianization.

***Deserters of Capitalist Peace***
***September 2025***

ΟΙ ΠΡΟΛΕΤΑΡΙΟΙ ΔΕΝ ΕΙΝΑΙ
ΚΡΕΑΣ ΓΙΑ ΤΑ ΚΑΝΟΝΙΑ
ΚΑΜΙΑΣ ΑΣΤΙΚΗΣ ΤΑΞΗΣ,
ΕΠΙΤΙΘΕΜΕΝΗΣ Ή
ΑΜΥΝΟΜΕΝΗΣ

Λιποτάκτ(ρι)ες της καπιταλιστικής ειρήνης

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# INTRODUCTION

## Picking Up the Thread of Class Analysis

Our primary political and theoretical reference point is the article *Behind the 21st Century Intifada*[1]—one of the most significant contributions to understanding the so-called "Israeli-Palestinian conflict". It approaches the issue as what it truly is: an expression of the **contradictions** of capitalist accumulation and the outcome of **class conflicts** within the region. The two interviews with E. Minassian (see Appendix I) extend this perspective into the present. Minassian revitalizes class analysis while maintaining a distance from narratives grounded in identity, anti-colonialism, or national sovereignty. Instead, he focuses on the spheres on which conflict and restructuring unfold in the current situation—where subjects are constituted through experiences of rejection and exclusion, under the firmly established condition of a "surplus" proletariat. Our intervention does not situate itself between the two approaches —Aufheben's earlier analysis and Minassian's more recent one— but views them as parts of a continuum. From within that continuity, we seek to contribute to the conversation that persists —even if only among scattered minorities— about the driving antagonism at the heart of capitalist societies: the lived reality of class struggle.

In his two interviews, Minassian seeks to interpret the socio-historical background of the October 7 attack and Israel's subsequent military operations. From the perspective of social struggles, this background emerged in the aftermath of the Second Intifada (2000-2005), through the systematic management and repression of the Palestinian working class. The uprising was assimilated and militarized by Palestinian "national liberation" organizations and crushed by Israeli military forces. Since then, the dynamics of Palestinian social struggles have been subjected to a **triple regime of repression**, exercised by three competing poles of power: Israel; the Palestinian Authority (hereinafter PA), which acts as an internal control mechanism for the Palestinian proletariat in the West Bank; and Hamas in Gaza, which militarizes discontent, recuperating it into spectacular but contained conflicts. All this has unfolded under the constant supervision of the Israeli state, which withdrew its settlers and army from Gaza in 2005 and which, with its *apartheid walls*, *checkpoints*, and *surveillance technologies*, fragments the Palestinian space and obstructs any collective, grassroots emancipation. These developments emerged as responses to contradictions that the Second Intifada had laid bare, reconfiguring them in new forms that have been erupting since October 7, 2023, and continue to do so today.

Both Minassian's and Aufheben's approaches —each shaped by their own historical context— go beyond the surface, the spectacular dimension, of current events, sharing a common starting point: the centrality of class struggle as the driving force of history. Any divergence between them

1. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002.

concerns the way they perceive the *national liberation* role of Hamas and the Palestine Liberation Organization (hereinafter PLO), *colonialism*, *war*, and *nationalism*. But before addressing these differences, it is worth emphasizing the most significant of the many points of convergence that arise from the emphasis on class relations: the deconstruction of the notion of a unified (oppressed) "people", let alone a "people" unified by a "common sense of dispossession." In Minassian's words:

> Starting with the "spatial unity" of Israel/Palestine is thus a way to avoid an analysis of the Palestinian question in terms of "a people without a state", **unified by a common sense of belonging and of dispossession** [emphasis ours]. This reading tends to essentialize national categories which are the products of social processes, and to root the violence of the Israeli state in a strict continuity from 1948 on, which does away with the place of this state within global dynamics.[2]

For Minassian, the central poles of class relations are, on one hand, the **"surplus proletariat"** of the West Bank and Gaza, excluded from the process of capitalist accumulation, and on the other, the **"comprador bourgeoisie"**, which oversees its management as a subcontractor for the Israeli state. For Aufheben, the proletarians of Gaza and the West Bank are part of a broader antagonistic subject: a Palestinian proletariat scattered across the Middle East, which played a decisive role in local struggles. This is the labor force that could not be smoothly integrated into the petroleum proletariat or the capitalist state of Israel. Aufheben witnessed the birth of the "surplus" population after the Oslo Accords (1993-95) and sought to identify the driving forces behind the First (1987-1993) and Second Intifadas. In their analysis, the Oslo Accords represent a critical moment in the neoliberal restructuring of Israeli capitalism, marking a rupture with the historical Jewish proletariat and its representative institutions.[3] It is clear to us that the dismantling of Labor Zionism and state-controlled trade unionism —long the foundation of the Zionist identification of land, labor, and nation— did not lead to internationalist solidarity or the liberation of the working class. Instead, it abolished old guarantees and the collective expression of labor. The collapse of the Histadrut did not open new possibilities for rupture, but deepened the defeat of the Israeli working class's struggles.

Minassian recognizes the strategic outcome of this process of integrating the Israeli proletariat under new conditions, even if he does not analyze it in detail. He depicts an Israeli state **without an active internal class rival**—a dominating force facing no internal fissures. The absence of the Jewish proletariat from his analysis is not accidental; he sees it as "remaining captive to the Israeli state", trapped in a position of functional integration, serving more as a pillar of state power than as a potential agent of class rupture. However, from our point of view, this assimilation is, of course, neither complete nor historically continuous. The Israeli proletariat is not entirely devoid of class dynamics. Mass movements, such as the 2011 uprisings against capitalist restructuring and the 2023 mobilizations against judicial reform, reveal that, in certain moments, social interests reconstitute themselves in opposition to the state.[4] These exceptions do not negate the

2. See Appendix I, *Two interviews with E. Minassian*, "*Palestine: People or Class? Part A*"

3. Aufheben does not view Oslo as merely a failed "peace agreement", but as a structural moment in which the Israeli state withdrew from direct rule over the Palestinians, enabling it to pursue its own neoliberal transition without the burden of reproducing the Palestinian proletariat; a moment in which social discipline was delegated to the Palestinian Authority in exchange for international legitimacy and funding; and a moment in which the West Bank and Gaza were transformed into tightly controlled labor and consumer markets.

4. See chapter 5 in this edition: *Israel 2023: the "political crisis" as a crisis of class relations.*

structural integration of the Israeli proletariat, but they serve as a reminder that social consensus is never irrevocable.

### *National Liberation Struggles*

For Aufheben, writing during the Second Intifada, the PLO functioned to translate social discontent into a national-liberation program. Minasian, writing twenty years later, questions whether Hamas and the PLO are still genuinely engaged in such a struggle. He sees in a managerial Hamas and a socially delegitimized PLO forms of power that have fully assumed the role of internally disciplining the surplus and the excluded, without any aim of national "liberation". Hamas may have carried out numerous attacks against Israel with the primary aim of disciplining Palestinians, but on October 7 in particular, it appears to have been negotiating directly with its "employer".

### *State Formations, Colonialism and Settlements*

For Minasian, the Israeli state functions as a unified capitalist formation, encompassing Gaza and the West Bank as territories that are manageable but not uniformly integrable. From his interviews, we understand that the paradoxical "solution" the Israeli state offers to the open question of national integration is not the incorporation of subordinate populations into a common political body, but rather a system of multiple administrative regimes, separate legal statuses, and proxy forms of governance (see "subcontractors"). Capitalist dominationis imposed without having ensured a collective social contract, through a fragmented biopolitical network of legal regimes, spatial exclusions, and graded social rights that organize work, survival, and movement according to the political status of each population category. Unable to achieve national integration, the Israeli state opts for a compromise solution: **apartheid**. Power is exercised across the whole territory, but the "people" as a unified political category is absent. The Israeli state produces and reproduces multiple social subjects without universality, grounding its sovereignty in division.

According to Minasian's periodization, the methods Israel has historically used for primitive accumulation and exploitation—and which it continues to employ for subjugation—are a legacy of colonialism.[5] However, he clearly departs from post-colonial interpretations that locate the problem exclusively in the relationship between external colonizer and internal colony. He emphasizes that Israel operates as a dominant political-economic machine that internally produces the **racist stratification** of populations—not simply as oppressed national bodies, but as parts of the proletariat. In contrast, two decades earlier, Aufheben, writing in a context with less stable mechanisms of exclusion and against the backdrop of the recent outbreak of social struggles (the Second Intifada) and their multifaceted repression and assimilation, did not adopt any form of anti-colonial perspective. Instead, they treat the critique of class relations not only as a fundamental but also as a sufficient analytical tool. From their perspective, settlements are understood not only as instruments of territorial control, but also as mechanisms of class discipline and reproduction within the Israeli social formation.

5. We cannot overlook the importance of the French context in shaping this anti-colonial interpretation. "Colonial methods" appear to refer to the similarity between techniques used to manage the "surplus" Palestinians and those applied to the "surplus" in the French banlieues, which, as practices of a de facto colonial state, may trace their origins to colonialism. Yet these methods are better understood as expressions of racist capitalism, visible, for example, in US ghettos, migrant camps, and working-class suburbs elsewhere. More broadly, "colonialism" functions in Minassian's discourse as a complex key concept—a hieroglyph in constant tension with the claim that "even in the dumps of capitalism there are social divisions".

This perspective remains crucial for us: the far-right parties that currently dominate the Israeli parliament draw their strength from the social and productive structure of the settlements, which function as arenas of class reconciliation and discipline for the Israeli proletariat, reorganizing the unity of the state along ethnic-class lines. In the methods employed by the Israeli state—from expropriation and exclusion to the management of the surplus population through proxy authority—we see the essence of contemporary capitalism. The state draws from the colonial arsenal not only forms of violence, but an entire technology of discipline and separation. What anti-colonialists interpret as colonialism is, for us, a classist-racist mechanism—an extension of capital. Those who invoke it on moral grounds overlook its materiality: it functions to discipline, integrate, and reproduce the defeat of the class as such, its incapacity to organize against capital, trapped in national symbols and military mechanisms. Recognition of these colonial technologies of governance is valuable only insofar as it contributes to the reconstruction of the internationalist critique of capitalist social relations from below—not to the cross-class rhetoric about "peoples".

### *War*

The subcontracting role of Palestinian political organizations arises from a process of transition: from the direct exploitation of Palestinian labor to their exclusion and management through local administrators, all under conditions of mediated state control. To understand Minasian's view of October 7 as a moment of negotiation between Hamas and Israel, it is necessary to recall that in 2006—four years after Aufheben addressed the "Palestinian" issue in their article—the PLO, with support from the US and Israel, seized power in the West Bank in a coup against the elected Hamas. Since then, Hamas has remained the local authority only in Gaza. This followed the withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from Gaza in the summer of 2005, setting the stage for a process of indirect mutual recognition between Hamas and the Israeli state, with the terms of proxy administration consolidated. Minasian emphasizes that the military operations unfolding after October 7, 2023, do not constitute war in the classical sense. Rather, they represent an armed negotiation between a subcontractor seeking to legitimize itself and an employer, taking place within the framework of a structure of internal sovereignty.

In contrast, Aufheben —writing while the Second Intifada was still unfolding— see a Hamas still attempting at that stage to give flesh and blood to a national-liberation movement, seeking to redirect social upheavals into a national war, and aspiring to become the key manager of a future Palestinian semi-state. Unlike Minasian, Aufheben consistently highlight the broader role of war in the Middle East and the complex relations between the oil-producing periphery and the capitalist core. Placing the management of the Palestinian working class at the center of regional capitalist contradictions, they interpret the historical Israeli-Arab conflict as a war over the subjugation of the proletariat—both within and beyond Israel's borders. From this standpoint, we agree that Israeli military operations hold strategic significance for the management of the surplus populations and the subjugation of the working class as a whole. The so-called "Palestinian question" thus remains a constant field for the **nationalization of the social question**—on both the Israeli and Arab sides. The dispersal of the Palestinian population made Palestinian identity inseparable from Arab identity, rendering the Palestinian proletariat crucial to the broader class composition of the Arab working class. Yet the Arab working classes of the Middle East have been called upon to express solidarity with the Palestinian people not through internationalist, working-class struggles, but through forms of national or religious brotherhood—and, in recent decades, through alignment with Hamas or other political or military organizations of Palestinian

national resistance. This process of nationalization replaces the possibility of class antagonism with the alignment of social forces along interclass fronts of power. Simultaneously, the Palestinian question serves as a mechanism for disciplining and nationally integrating the Israeli proletariat within the framework of neoliberal restructuring. Furthermore, the Israeli-Palestinian relation cannot be confined to the internal dynamics of the Israeli state. It extends into the wider process of capitalist and geopolitical realignment across the region—reflected, for instance, in the suspension of the Abraham Accords (2020, between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco) by several Arab states, following the escalation of Israeli operations in Gaza. In this view, war is not an accident, deviation, or mere instrument of negotiation. It is a decisive tool of integration, mediation, and the reconstruction of social control—for the Israeli state, for the administrators of the Palestinian population, and for the Arab regimes alike.

## *Nationalism*

Aufheben and Minasian approach Palestinian nationalism from distinct theoretical vantage points, reaching different political conclusions. For Aufheben, nationalism functions as a refraction of class struggle—a distorting prism through which antagonistic class interests superficially appear identical. Through our discussions of this central idea, we came to understand that Aufheben locates the proletariat in a privileged position within social emancipation, by virtue of its place in the relations of production. They consistently discern in class struggles the potential to assume a communist character. From this perspective, the nationalization of the Palestinian question appears as a bourgeois response, mediated by the national liberation organizations, a mechanism for replacing class autonomy with a cross-class alliance around the notion of "the people". In this light, Aufheben interpret the defeat of the First Intifada as the triumph of the movement's nationalist turn. The nationalization of the uprising was accomplished through the formation of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising, which succeeded in recuperating the intense class conflicts of the early weeks into a line of "national unity" under the auspices of the PLO. The shift from the looting of landowners and proletarian strikes to the rhetoric of "the heroic masses of our people" signaled the assimilation of autonomous class struggle into an embryonic state project—that is, a struggle for the establishment of Palestinian state power.

Minassian analyzes nationalism as a terrain that flourishes amid crises of social reproduction—a space in which the proletariat may become ensnared, yet also seek forms of collective presence when all other avenues of political expression have collapsed. For him, the notion of "the people" operates as the last available form of politicization in moments when state power loses

legitimacy. In conditions where the traditional, or any, figure of the working class has disintegrated, where ghettoization predominates, political representation falters, and the institutions of reproduction—education, housing, social insurance—are dismantled, national symbols can, in his view, become conduits for class rage among the excluded. In the concentrated zones of the "surplus" —refugee camps, impoverished suburbs— the nation and religion substitute for community; national symbols become the final points of reference for social indignation. Minassian suggests that such symbols may at times elude the control of managerial and military apparatuses, acquiring an autonomous momentum of their own: flags without a state, expressing a desire for representation where no political discourse from below exists.

Despite Minassian's crucial contribution —his insistence that *even in capitalism's wastelands* there remain classes and class struggle— he ultimately grants a certain legitimacy to the anti-colonial project of national liberation. While he acknowledges the pattern of nationalization of class struggles through national-liberation organizations (such as Fatah), he still suggests that, away from these organizations, an "anti-hierarchical" struggle carried out under the banner of a "people" may possess a social dimension—class antagonisms included—and thus may warrant a form of critical solidarity. We share this view only insofar as such struggles place social and class questions at their core rather than organizing themselves around the horizon of nation-state formation. Yet Minassian leaves ambiguous whether the struggles he invokes retain a predominantly social dimension, and what kind of solidarity he envisions. From our standpoint, the nationalization of struggles turns national symbols into **fetishized** expressions of the very need for class conflict. While it is the class needs of the proletarians that underlie their convergence in the context of social struggles, national symbols appear as necessary means of mobilization, yet in doing so mystify the distinction between social needs and national demands.

We contend that the central issue in the region is racism—the **racial stratification** of the proletariat. Social differences among proletarians, and the resulting hierarchies, are rooted in the objective fragmentation of the working class under capitalist (re)production. Divisions that appear to be based on ethnicity or cultural identity are, in fact, expressions of one's position within the social division of labor. As Gilles Dauvé observed when commenting on the "White Riot" of 1922 in South Africa:[6]

> Proletarian disunity is no planned policy on the part of crafty bosses manipulating rival social or ethnic groups, it results from labour competing with itself for jobs and better conditions. The relevant question is how this inevitable division process could be overcome. As long as proletarians fight for work, especially in today's context of high unemployment, they fight for a place within capitalism, against the boss, but it can also be against competing proletarians. Though there are numerous examples of workplace or neighbourhood conflicts where different – and sometimes previously rival – groups act together, the proletarians remain divided as long as they fight primarily as labour.

Nationalization is the mechanism through which racist-capitalist stratification in the region is projected into the political sphere. During the period under consideration, Palestinian nationalist organizations, even in the absence of a complete state, formed early—but functional—incarnations of a capitalist state; both as a welfare and integration apparatus and as a surveillance

6. Gilles Dauve, "White Riot, 1922", troploin.fr, 2018.

apparatus, undertaking the social reproduction of the most disciplined segments of the class on **clientelistic terms**. Work, care, education, or protection were provided not according to material need, but according to political loyalty, national identification, or "party discipline". In this way, the field of social reproduction becomes a site of **internal division** within the Palestinian working class—between the integrated and the excluded, the "politically useful" and the masses. This network of institutions is highly specific and ranges from the social networks of Hamas—in the case of Gaza—which provide schools, hospitals, and compensation to the families of "martyrs", to the management of humanitarian aid and job allocations by the Palestinian Authority, which acts as an intermediary administrator of European and international funding in exchange for the obedience of the population – in the case of the West Bank. Similar functions had already emerged under the PLO in the 1970s and 1980s in the camps of Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, where armed nationalist organizations combined resource distribution with hierarchical control, reproducing distinctions between loyal fighters and the less committed Palestinian population.

Here, the subjectivity of the exploited is not shaped around the rejection of exploitation or a revolutionary break with the capitalist order, but around the anguished navigation within a clientelistic system of distribution, evaluation, and discipline. The very status of "fighter" or "citizen" is tied directly to usefulness to the national project. In this context, the Palestinian proletariat's attachment to the impending national project functions not merely as **false consciousness**, but as a material necessity for survival, orchestrated by entities that effectively act as wardens of the surplus proletariat. Consequently, the working class is not constituted as a class in itself; instead, it folds back upon its own divisions—racial, cultural, political—seeking integration not as a collective force, but as clients of the national apparatus. This condition constitutes one of the principal obstacles to any emancipatory perspective in the region.

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Returning to Minassian and Aufheben, the differences in their analyses stem from two distinct conceptions of class relations. Aufheben treats national symbols as instruments that bury class struggle, suppressing and subjugating proletarian demands, whereas Minassian sees class conflict as capable of being expressed—rather than *refracted*—through national symbols. In other words, in terms of the rallying of the working class around the category of "the people" and any expectations for the emergence of social emancipatory struggles through this rallying, Aufheben sees the glass as half empty, while Minassian sees it as half full. For Minassian, the possibility of autonomous class struggle resides among the "supernumerous" Palestinians on the margins of capitalist production. His conception of class draws not only on his travels in the West Bank, but also from the banlieues of Paris and the struggles of the surplus population there. Aufheben, by contrast, situates class relations beyond individual camps and state borders, emphasizing the generalization of struggles across the Middle East and the West as central to the emergence of a social movement capable of countering nationalist containment. In their own words:

> There have been tendencies among both Palestinians and Israelis to resist their incorporation in the opposing state machines and their war logic. But ultimately the development of such tendencies into a social movement that is capable of breaking out of the deadlock of mutually reinforcing nationalisms cannot be found within the

> bounds of this conflict in isolation. Rather, such a development is bound up with the generalization of proletarian struggles in the Middle East, and crucially, in the West.[7]

It is no accident that Aufheben analyzed the Second Intifada in the wake of the anti-globalization movement, which demonstrated the potential for internationalist movements in the 21st century.[8] The obstacles they identify to such internationalist prospects are most clearly articulated in their theory of nationalism—developed in their reflections on the Yugoslav Wars[9]—where their engagement with the process of nationalization exposes one of its central functions: the fragmentation and assimilation of struggles through material divisions.

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Capital's response to the uprisings now flaring across the Middle East, the West, and the world at large takes the form of the rekindling and escalation of war, investment in insecurity, and the widespread militarization of society. The contradiction between superfluity and indispensability of the proletariat once again comes to the fore, as the boundaries between these two poles grow ever more fluid. The nationalization of struggles thus reappears as an increasingly urgent problem, assuming forms, new and old, adapted to the crisis's relentless deepening. Against this backdrop, the struggles of the proletariat —the living core of the crisis itself— call for a practical critique of nationalization: a revolutionary discovery of material forms of organization capable of overcoming divisions and capitalist social relations in their entirety.

***Cops of the Palestinian Authority in action... from a demonstration in Hebron in February 2017***

7. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002.
8. "Anti-capitalism as an ideology… and as a movement?", Aufheben #10, 2002.
9. "Class Decomposition In The New World Order: Yugoslavia Unravelled", Aufheben #2, 1993.

# PART 1

# 1.

## Israel as method

At the end of January 2025, Tamar Gozansky, a historic member of the left-wing Hadash party, in an interview with the Haaretz newspaper,[10] points to two methodological assumptions that are politically important for understanding the situation that has developed since October 7: (a) The current war in Gaza must be linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has been going on for many decades. In other words, the necessary historical context must be provided in order to reveal the full complexity and contradictions of the social relations that led to the current situation. (b) The regime represented by Netanyahu can only be overthrown through an uprising and not through the continuation of military hostilities. However, it implies that the reverse is also true: war, in its current form and function, will only end with the fall of the regime through a subversive process.

How have we reached the point where these conditions, irreplaceable in their critical capability, have been marginalized in public debate for two years now? The search for possible answers to this question must focus on the retreat of the labor movement as the horizon of social criticism and not tacitly elevate it to a temporary phenomenon that will soon be reversed. Regardless, however, of any disagreements we may have with the political program of the party from which Gozansky comes, we do not consider it coincidental that the return of class analysis and forms of proletarian struggle to the forefront —certainly carrying special weight as the only means of blocking the war—is being done by people who have actively participated in these struggles and know the history of the labor movement.[11] The adoption of class analysis as a critique of capitalist social relations can never be an abstract theory, a simple perspective among others, because it is both a method of reading the reality shaped by the power of capital and a call for its transformation.

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From the outset (1920), the geographical territory of present-day Israel-Palestine was riddled with fundamental contradictions, which stemmed from its status as a *mandate* territory rather than a colony. As it was part of the former Ottoman Empire, Great Britain was tasked with "preparing" the liberated peoples who lived there to take responsibility for their own governance

10. "To Dislodge Netanyahu, You Need a Revolt': An Interview With an Israeli Communist Icon", Haaretz, 23.1.25.

11. It is no coincidence that, as early as 2018, in the preface to her book, Mizrahi Communists, she criticizes the post-colonial perspective, which precisely obscures the common struggles between Jews and Arabs in the Israel-Palestine territory.

after a reasonable period of time, but always under the supervision of the League of Nations, in contrast to what happens in colonies, where the goal is long-term exploitation and absolute control. The demand for national self-determination—in line with the views then held by both Lenin and US President Wilson, reflecting the sentiments of peoples around the world who were in the process of forming their own nations, and therefore also of the Jews and Arabs – clashed in its implementation with the willingness of the superpowers of the time (Great Britain, France) to behave as imperialist conquerors, putting their own particular interests first. Furthermore, despite the many problems brought about by the end of World War I, the newly established British rule did not prioritize improving the living standards of the population, but rather the continuity of the state through the renewal of basic Ottoman laws and institutions. Later, while European states were building high protective walls during the crisis of the 1930s, the League of Nations prohibited the *British Mandate* from discriminating in its trade policy against any other state. For this reason, the British denied Palestine the privileges they granted to their colonies in terms of access to the markets of the British Commonwealth,[12] with the result that the consequences of the free movement of capital in the lower social strata were severe.


***Jerusalem during the period of the British Mandate.***

12. The British policy of "trusteeship" promoted the image of the empire as a "guardian" that was supposed to guide its colonies toward progress. In the same spirit, the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts (1929, 1940, 1945) financed infrastructure, education, and health projects with the aim of stabilizing power, integrating the colonies economically, and preventing social unrest and uprisings, laws that were not applied in the case of the British Mandate in the Palestine region.

The trade unions, whose establishment had been tolerated by the British Mandate,[13] would not be able to counteract the effects of the crisis. However, as early as 1939, the first interventions in the labor market linking wages to the cost of living and adjusting them accordingly can be dated. The *Arab Revolt* (1936-39) may have been defeated, but it had become clear to those in power how far the proletarian classes of the city and the countryside could go if they felt they were being treated unfairly. Considering that wage labor gained wider recognition and rights through the national labor agreement signed in 1942—with World War II in full swing— –we can reasonably argue that the establishment of the State of Israel is based *specifically* on this type of recognition of wage labor, beyond the "conquest of labor" preached by labor Zionism.

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The deepening of the capitalist organization of labor and the accumulation of capital in the territory of the British Mandate will influence the way in which they are organized internally, and politically recognized by the central authority, both the Arab and Jewish communities, as they are already class-stratified. And if for the Arabs this will mean, generally speaking, social decline and proletarianization, in the case of the Jewish Yishuv,[14] these developments will be marked by the prevalence of labor Zionism, especially after 1923. On the Jewish side, capital, labor, and land will be related to each other in the particular way that corresponds to them within the framework of a national plan aimed at establishing a state-refuge from persecution. This is the main reason why it is impossible to establish a clear-cut relationship of exploitation of one community (the Arab) by the other (the Jewish).

The Jewish proletariat of Eastern Europe had been confronted with the inability to be integrated into the struggles of the native proletariat and, consequently, seeking its emancipation through participation in the struggles of the working class internationally.[15] Apart from those who had managed to leave as immigrants, only a minority was able to escape from the ghetto in which the mass of Jewish proletarians was confined and join the "local" Russian or Polish parties. But the social and political exclusion of this proletariat also favored the emergence of another militant faction, which remained attached to the ghetto and which, as a result of the pogroms, sought its own socialist solution: a Jewish "socialism," a socialism based on Zionism. The "second" Zionism, alongside and in competition with the bourgeois one, was born. As Jewish proletarians were prevented from being integrated and struggling as a class in the productive base of Eastern Europe, the Zionists advocated the conquest of another base (in Palestine), where they could realize socialism and emancipation and where the Jewish people would finally become "a people like all others," integrated into the productive process. Precisely because *"the emancipation of the Jewish people will be the work of Jewish labor or it will not exist"*, labor Zionism, and the ensuing colonization of Palestine, are first and foremost the expression of a national liberation movement.

13. At the same time, in colonial India, it took more than 100 years of contract labor without collective rights, which led to the dispersion of Indian workers across the globe. The first trade union was established in Madras in 1918, the same year that the British took over the administration of Palestine. It is very likely that the success of the Russian Revolution a year earlier played an important role in the change of policy.

14. The Jewish Yishuv (ישוב) refers to the Jewish communities and settlements established by Zionists after 1880, which formed the nucleus of the future State of Israel.

15. The following is taken from the special section on Zionism of the French journal Le Brise-Glace, issues 2-3 and 4, spring 1989-summer 1990.

The foundations of a Jewish economy in Palestine were laid under the leadership of socialist Zionist parties, based on the principles of state capitalist ideology. It was not built by private investment according to market laws, but by the Histadrut, the Jewish labor union founded in 1920. The Histadrut created and organized a Jewish industry based on the monopoly of "Jewish labor," where it imposed the wage levels of skilled European workers on Jewish workers from Eastern Europe, who were themselves skilled craftsmen. This Jewish industry, which refused to employ the cheap, unskilled labor of Palestinian workers, therefore developed under conditions of unprofitability that were completely contrary to the laws of the market, which would have been unthinkable if Zionism had been a simple bourgeois colonialism. Having imposed the monopoly of "Jewish labor," the Histadrut also imposed the monopoly of "Jewish trade," thus organizing the Jewish population into a consumer cooperative. The hegemony of socialist and labor ideology within Zionism thus made it possible to create the agricultural and industrial foundations of a nation, ignoring the laws of capitalist competition.

This does not mean, of course, that socialist Zionism was in any way anti-capitalist. A by-product of the defeat of the proletarian revolution in Europe and of anti-Semitism, socialist Zionism was historically the first *dogmatic* formulation of the theory of socialism in a single country, the realization of which exemplified a movement that integrated itself in its own way (anti-bourgeois, anti-competitive) into the global logic of capital. Unlike Stalinism, socialist Zionism could not impose "pure" state capitalism on Palestinian society. It essentially had to "buy" its national base before transforming it, and to do so, it needed the capital of the Western Jewish bourgeoisie (which had an interest in the success of the venture in order to defuse the explosive issue of the Jews of Eastern Europe). Therefore, it had to make room for the bourgeoisie within the society it was building. The social base of this bourgeoisie was made up of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois who fled to Palestine in the 1930s to escape anti-Semitic persecution in Europe. This led to the formation of a private sector alongside the "workers' economy" sector run by the Histadrut.

The price of acquiring land was high, and this was not only due to the rapid rise in prices throughout the British Mandate. The Arab reaction to Jewish settlement had initially manifested itself against the arrival of the first immigrants, at the end of the 19th century, when the outbreak of widespread riots in 1929 and the imposition of a state of emergency by the British administration left no room for misinterpretation or procrastination. The imposition of quotas on Jewish immigration would be a landmark measure in terms of maintaining internal balance, albeit temporarily, for two main reasons.

Firstly, by leaving only the quantitative aspect in the hands of the British administration, i.e. the determination of the number of Jews allowed to enter the territory at specific periods of time, it allowed the Jewish leadership to maintain qualitative control, i.e., who and from where they would receive the immigration certificate. In any case, British support for the Zionist plan was neither permanent nor unambiguous, as Arab interests also had to be taken seriously into account.

Secondly, since the flows of migrants did not only concern those who wanted to come to Palestine, but also those who no longer wished to remain there, the choice of land that could and should be purchased came to be determined largely by the profile of the Jews who were available at any given time. Consequently, the "labor" factor of the trinity formula[16] took on particular

16. Land, labor, and capital constitute the framework within which value is produced in capitalism. The relationship between them determines the limits of productivity and profitability.

importance, as it affected the potential value of the land itself, the (differential) ground rent itself.[17] Put differently, the value of the labor force became the essential factor in determining any profit margins, at a time when all other constraints appeared to be inflexible. For this reason, for example, as early as the second decade of the twentieth century, the Jews of Yemen were chosen as the segment of the immigrant labor force that could be further undervalued in competition with Arab workers, whenever this was deemed necessary.[18]

During the Arab revolt of 1936, it became apparent that a solid bond had been forged between capital and labor on the Jewish side through the Zionist project. We can define this bond as a form of *welfare state*, which was not fundamentally based on an industrial model of labor organization that would have become socially dominant, but on an environment of expanded commercial/ agricultural capitalism. Land is placed at the center as a means of capital exploitation and as a means of integrating Jewish immigrants arriving in the region, with all the impediments mentioned above. Its national symbolic investment, however, would be inextricably linked to Jewish labor and the securing of its privileges.[19]

The modern state of Israel, which would emerge in 1948 after the victorious war against neighboring Arab states, would be founded on this welfare state and symbolized by the self-managed kibbutz, it goes without saying that no one can now ignore the extent to which the Nazi "final solution" was sought to be implemented. The relative industrial development that would ensue, based on small and very small businesses, would, on the one hand, be subject to this pattern and, on the other, extend this compromise between capital and labor to new areas of production and consumption. However, the contradictions that this generates will remain unresolved and acute.

At a first level, alongside the hunt for the (communist) internal enemy and the subsequent control of mentalities, the necessary racist stratification of the workforce will be restored, it may accompany any development of state-capital relations, but in the case of Israel, it constituted a fundamental way of solving chronic labor productivity problems. This method now had to be renewed, as hundreds of thousands of new immigrants were pouring into the new state, they for a long time remained subsidized consumers of state rations and vouchers, users of health and welfare services, homeowners, etc., before finding the right place in the production process

17. Differential ground rent is a term used by Marx to refer to the extra profit that arises due to the different qualitative characteristics and unequal productivity of land. If a piece of land has superior qualities (e.g., fertility, location), then it produces more value at a lower cost of labor and capital. This difference in productivity translates into extra profit (surplus value), which the landowner reaps as "differential ground rent." As we show, the value of land in Palestine was determined not only by the market and the location, but also by the value of the labor force available at the time. In other words, depending on the profile of the migrant worker (more productive), the greater the potential profitability that the land could yield and the more appropriate its integration into the Zionist plan, hence the reference to differential ground rent.

18. On these issues, the arguments developed in Baruch Kimmerling, Zionism and Territory: the socio-territorial dimensions of Zionist politics, University of California, 1983, are particularly relevant.

19. An additional key reason that supports the argument in favour of a form of welfare state based on commercial/ agricultural capitalism and a relatively liberal semi-state framework is the fact that this whole process is taking place in a territory where the Jewish working class has a significant presence in the so-called sphere of civil society (parties, trade unions, clubs, cultural and other associations, etc.) and is recognized by the official institutional framework of the British Mandate. The comparison with French colonial Algeria is illuminating: the first trade unions were created in 1898, 68 years after the invasion and overthrow of the local regime, and local workers were not allowed to join them, only the settlers, as this was prohibited by the civil code that applied outside metropolitan France.

to extract the necessary amount of surplus value from them. From a political point of view, this process will be codified in the 1952 *Citizenship Act*, along with the establishment of temporary detention centers for the newly arrived Jewish labor force and the distinct treatment of Palestinians who choose to remain in the country, only ostensibly recognized as holders of equal political and social rights.

***Matzpen demonstration in front of the Labor Party building in Tel Aviv, protesting against the settlement in Hebron, April 12 1981***

In any case, however, the situation will not remain static. As the Israeli capitalist social formation evolves, it brings alongside the adaptation of tools for managing and devaluing the labor force, which make the violence of exploitation more invisible and more deeply socialized, touching on more aspects of social relations. The Tel Aviv Stock Exchange may have been established in 1953 and the Central Bank of Israel in 1954, but the use of *monetary devaluation* against proletarian wage demands and expectations was incorporated into the new paradigm from the outset.[20] Emerging inflation would lead to the abandonment of food rationing and import restrictions as measures for curbing the trade deficit and to the adoption of the first coherent restrictive economic policy in early 1952. Its central element will be the renewal and refinement of the depreciation of the Israeli lira through the exchange rate system, a goal that this time will be publicly announced.

20. "When the state of Israel was established, the Israeli pound (introduced in August 1948) was on a par with the pound sterling. A broken cross-rate system, however, was in existence, inherited from the last few years of the British mandatory regime: while the rate of exchange between the dollar and the pound sterling implied a cross rate of about IL 0.250 to the dollar (somewhat above $4 per pound), the direct rate of exchange between the Israeli pound and the dollar (and the implied rates with a few other hard currencies) was about IL 0.333 to the dollar ($3 per pound). With the British devaluation of September 1949, the Israeli pound remained on a par with sterling, and the rate of exchange with the dollar was made equal to that of sterling—IL 0.357 per dollar ($2.80 per pound). Thus, the changes in September 1949 left the rate of exchange of the Israeli pound against some currencies (mainly sterling) unchanged, but against some other currencies (primarily the U.S. dollar) the pound was devalued by about 7 per cent". Michael Michaely, "Foreign Trade Regimes and Economic Development: Israel", especially Chapter 5, which outlines the corresponding processes of currency devaluation until early 1975, the year the book was published.

1952 would be a year of central importance for yet another reason: the conclusion of an agreement on the payment of German reparations over a period of fifteen years and its final approval by the Knesset amid intense protests and stormy reactions from both the right and the left of the political spectrum would be a crucial test for the bourgeois parliamentary character of the political system.[21] Henceforth, a dominant state narrative of the national interest is being reestablished above and beyond its particular definitions, which is capable of reconciling conflicting interests within the multi-party system of balance and compromise. Furthermore, the aim is to establish a more solid basis for a model of accumulation that can combine austerity with extra benefits external to the wage-productivity link, the rise in living standards and consumption with the continuous growth of the economy, while recognizing, nevertheless, that deficit budgets cannot persist indefinitely.

When, in 1962, the decision was taken to devalue the Israeli lira by 17%, it became clear that the post-war model of development had reached its limits and that at stake was the very foundation of bourgeois-capitalist hegemony. As this devaluation did not bring the expected results – in view of the imminent end of German reparations, which, among other things, fed the state coffers with much-needed hard currency — the increase in the degree of exploitation takes on the characteristics of a direct attack on wage labor: in 1965, a government of national unity is formed, which implements a plan to artificially slow down the pace of economic growth.[22] In other words, industrial sabotage by employers and the threat of unemployment were used to bring workers' demands into line at a lower level, compatible with the adoption of a new export-oriented model of accumulation. The opening up to international competition was expected to discipline both workers and, secondarily, those capitalists who were in no hurry to modernize their production processes, content with the privileges conferred on them by their integration into the local economy.

In the early months of 1967, the recession had reached its lowest point and inevitably, at least from the perspective of those written about here, the question arose as to whether the outbreak of the Six-Day War was related to the state policy of that period. It matters little whether it was initiated by the Egyptian and Syrian states, taking advantage of the tense situation inside Israel, or whether, conversely, a deliberately limited military intervention was used to strengthen national unity inside Israel in order to cement social opposition. What is most emphasized is that the outcome was largely unexpected, as the issue of Israel's borders had until then been considered resolved and all reconstruction efforts were based on the geographical and demographic realities of the time. There are certain incidents in history, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, which no one could have accurately predicted, but whose consequences were profound and long-lasting.

The fact that the conquest of territory was not central to the new model of capitalist accumulation would become apparent a few years later, when a prerequisite for the conclusion of a peace agreement with Egypt would be the return of the Sinai Peninsula from Israel, which had been conquered during those very six days in June – proving, that colonization could be reversed and settlements dismantled if necessary in order to achieve the necessary political stability. On the

21. The corresponding decision will be adopted by a narrow majority of 61-50 and will never be challenged afterwards, even though the session will be interrupted for a long time by protesters storming the voting chamber.

22. A process described in detail in all its stages by Carol Schwartz Greenwald in her book Recession as a Policy Instrument: Israel 1965-1969. Columbia University, 1973. It is worth noting that the policy of full employment was so politically entrenched that Israel did not even provide unemployment benefits. "Support" for the unemployed was first implemented in early 1967.

other hand, the proletarianization of approximately one million Palestinians will not take place under the conditions of the past: retaining sovereignty over the territory, the Israeli state will share, for example, the responsibility for managing the population of the West Bank with the Jordanian state, which until then had been in charge of governance. The Jordanian currency will continue to circulate there, Jordanian civil servants will continue to be paid from the Jordanian state budget, and many Palestinians will continue to retain Jordanian citizenship. With no desire for integration and based on the "need" to devalue them to the maximum extent possible, territory and population will tend to become completely separated. This means that the Israeli state will impose on the Palestinians a police model of internal-external migration, where statelessness will be accompanied by the minimization of reproduction costs for its own budget. For the rest, things will remain the same: the new 17% currency devaluation in November 1967 cannot be justified by any fiscal argument, as it is taking place under conditions of continuing recession despite the increase in the budget due to war expenditure, and can only be understood as a capitalist show of force.

From that point on, it can be said that the conditions are being created for overcoming the previous post-war model in terms of accumulation through crises, while at the same time the (non) sustainability of the Palestinian social formation is structurally integrated into the maintenance of the Israeli welfare state and the (non) overcoming of its contradictions. This means that the conduct and preparation of war acquire, de facto, the character of internal negotiation and occupy such a position in the state budget that it reflects, each time, the subjugation of the working class and the restriction of its demands, both Palestinian and Jewish. Beyond, therefore, the vague national borders, it is because of the inextricable interconnection between the reproduction of the Palestinian and Israeli proletariat that one can now speak of a single capitalist social formation, Israel-Palestine, which is constantly evolving due to the particularly dynamic contradictions it contains within it. As the so-called "Palestinian question" becomes a vehicle for the subsequent introduction of neoliberal capitalist relations, the reverse is also true: any "solution" to it is inextricably linked to the form of the welfare state, and therefore to the resolution of the social question within Israel-Palestine.

As the oil crises of 1973 and 1979 would directly impact capital accumulation inside Israel, causing a sharp rise in inflation,[23] it is important to identify a low point: 1976 is not only the year when growth will become almost zero, but also the year when the Land Day protests will break out, the first within the so-called occupied territories, centered on mass resistance to the settlements.[24] If we also include the resolute anti-represssion demonstrations in the West Bank in March 1977

23. This was preceded by another 20% devaluation in 1971, due to the decoupling of the dollar from the gold standard and the subsequent collapse of the Bretton Woods system. The sectors that would dominate after the change of paradigm in 1967 would be the military industry and the financial sector, both understood in the broadest sense. As shown in "Inflation and Accumulation: The Case of Israel" by Jonathan Nitzan and Shimson Bichler, the development of one sector cannot be understood without the development of the other, and from a political point of view, it is important to emphasize this.

24. On March 30, 1976, rebellious demonstrations broke out from Galilee to the Negev when the Israeli government announced a plan to confiscate approximately 20 square kilometers of land "for state purposes" between the Arab villages of Sakhnin and Arraba. The general strike and marches against land expropriation by the Israeli state were met with repression and the killing of six protesters. Land, as the foundation of social reproduction for Palestinian communities, was turned into a field of class war: its loss meant proletarianization and displacement, while its defense became a banner of struggle against capitalist expropriation and Israeli control. It was the first time since 1948 that Arabs in Israel had organized a response to Israeli settlement policies. Land Day has since become a day of protest for Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line.

– which were apparently inspired by the widespread riots over bread that broke out in January of the same year in Cairo and many other cities in Egypt following the abolition of food subsidies – it is perhaps possible to understand the background of circulation of struggles, against which the elections that would prove to be a turning point in the history of Israeli society would take place a few months later, in which, for the first time after decades of Labour Party rule, Likud will take power.

In 1979, inflation had reached 111.4%, and the issue at stake was no longer just the inability of the currency to reliably serve as a store of value, but value itself as a form of socialization of capitalist relations.[25] The shekel replaced the Israeli pound at a ratio of one to ten in 1980, but the first decisive stage of restrictive economic policy could not be implemented until September 1982. The timing can hardly be considered coincidental, coming just three months after the Israeli army invaded Lebanon.[26] The expulsion of Palestinian guerrillas from Lebanon would minimize thereafter any threat they posed, while contributing to the deaths of thousands of civilians. However, the nature of the military operation is inextricably linked to the resolution of the crisis within Israeli society. For this reason, the army will withdraw from Lebanon in 1985, when the government of national unity that will emerge from the early elections in 1984 will have succeeded in stabilizing the situation and averting the prospect of systemic collapse, with the valuable support of the United States.[27]

The unexpected outbreak of the First Intifada will reveal the limits of neoliberal management up to that point and the dangers inherent in the continued and deliberate absence of a social compromise on the Palestinian side. In particular, however, it would reveal the profound consequences that prolonged social mobilization can have at a time of structural change: after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, and in an context of intensifying globalization, how can a state attract investors if it does not appear to be a pole of stability and security for the valorization of capital?[28]

The outbreak of the Second Intifada would be a real turning point for the transformation of the Israeli state, as it would lead to the outbreak of a deep crisis during the period 2001-2003.[29] "Everything must change," and Netanyahu is once again at the helm of change, this time in his position as Minister of Finance. It is not just that 2003 marks the beginning of a period of wage restraint, cuts in all kinds of benefits, changes in labor relations and the relation between employment and unemployment, and a new pension reform. Since 2009, as a result of the experience of managing the 2007 crisis on a global scale, land has ceased to be state property that cannot be fully commercialized and has been incorporated into the cycle of capitalist valorization, while at

25. For the difference between inflation and hyperinflation and how the latter was narrowly avoided in the case of Israel, the article by Sébastien Charles and Jonathan Marie, "How Israel avoided hyperinflation: The success of its 1985 stabilization plan in the light of post-Keynesian theory," is particularly informative.

26. The relevant announcements will be made one year after the parliamentary elections, in which Likud will renew its rule. The first invasion of Lebanon takes place only in 1978, after several years of exclusively air raids in the region.

27. In 1984, inflation will be 444.9%, in 1985 185.2%, and in 1986 just 19.6%.

28. Israel's exclusion from participating in the multinational force that carried out the Gulf War in 1991 suggested at the time that this question should be answered in the negative. Shortly thereafter, a serious attempt was made to amend the regime's *Basic Laws*, the first since 1948, in the direction of legally incorporating "human dignity and liberty." In 1990, Israel's government debt would be 130% of GDP.

29. "Israelis Forgot What It's Like to Have a Financial Crisis – but the Worst Is Yet to Come", Haaretz, 8/5/2024.

the same time intensifying the phenomenon of violent settlements on land that until then had been under the sovereignty of the Palestinian Authority. These are the first steps in a process that will later lead to the emergence and spread of speculation on real estate prices and, consequently, to the creation of successive bubbles. In other words, this is the process that will allow the expansion of private debt and the establishment of a different relation and ratio between debt and labor wages: one of the central pillars of neoliberal capitalist management.

When the third pension reform in 12 years takes place in 2008, it will have been preceded by the second intervention in Lebanon in 2006 and the outbreak of the subprime mortgage crisis in 2007, and the degree of militarization of the neoliberal model of capitalist management will have become more than apparent : both the construction of the wall and the imposition of strict mobility controls on Palestinians (culminating in the open imprisonment of surplus people in Gaza) and the constant downgrading of all those population groups in Israel who are at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Arabs, Bedouins, women, the elderly, young people) take place within a context of permanent blackmail. In turn, the generalization of discipline and violence, up to and including brief military interventions and mass killings, leads to the hardening of the racist hierarchy, which in turn feeds back into it. Perhaps the culmination of this process, which takes place in an environment of retreating social struggles, finds its peak in the 2018 law that essentially reestablishes the Israeli state as a Jewish state.[30]


***Homeless in southern Tel Aviv.***

30. The relevant Basic Law was passed by the Knesset on July 19, 2018, with 62 votes in favor, 55 against, and 2 abstentions. It defines Israel as "the nation-state of the Jewish people" and recognizes the exercise of the right of national self-determination only for the Jewish people. It classifies Jewish elements as supreme state values, such as the development of Jewish settlements, while removing Arabic from institutional equality – downgrading the Arabic language from official to "special."

The many successive elections and changing electoral arrangements point to a permanent instability in the parliamentary system of representation, but on the other hand, dialectically, they reflect certain stable dynamics that permeate Israeli social formation, now irrevocably known as Israel-Palestine: the dissolution of Zionist ideology, in which the Labor Party traditionally invested, and the strengthening of far-right hegemony over the social base of the Mizrahi settlers. Following the large mobilizations of the squares movement in 2011, the months-long protests against constitutional reform in 2023—whose central issue is the unhindered continuation of settlements, i.e., the continuation of the previous model of the welfare state, which has now become openly violent – not only show the accumulated frictions within broad sections of Israeli society, but also the degree to which these tensions and divisions can crystallize in the form of a slow-burning civil war.

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Leaving his position on Netanyahu's staff in 2004, after serving two years on the budget committee, Uri Yogev will state:[31]

> - What do you consider your greatest achievement while you were in office?
>
> - There is one achievement that, in my opinion, constitutes a historic revolution, the benefits of which will continue to be enjoyed by the State of Israel for many years to come. We managed to take advantage of the recession to change the rules of the game and promote the most radical revolution of all—the dismantling of organized labor.

31. «המדינה קרקעות את ולמכור המינהל את לפרק צריך» , Haaretz, 5/5/2004, ["We must dismantle the administration and sell the state land"]

# ETHNICIZATION AND CLASS COMPOSITION IN ISRAEL

The Palestinian population within Israel is made up of those segments of the Palestinian population who were not displaced to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, etc., during the 1948 war. While more than 700,000 were expelled at that time, the 160,000 who remained were placed under military rule in order to prevent resistance to the ongoing and targeted expropriation of land and the discrimination they faced in the labour market. After the 1967 war and the conquest of the territories of the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan, this policy toward Palestinians in Israel was lifted and a strategy of their integration was adopted. Even the Histadrut, the emblematic trade union of labour Zionism, gradually began to admit them into its ranks—theoretically as equals, but not in practice. Since then, Palestinian workers have played an active role in major strike struggles and uprisings within Israel, with issues such as land expropriation and state programmes of "Judaization" of areas (for example in the Galilee, which played a decisive role in the outbreak of the Second Intifada) often taking centre stage.

Today, within Israel, the term "Arab labour" refers to low-paid, manual jobs, often implying a lower quality of service. This ideological, racist condition reflects the material reality of the Israeli labour market. One quarter of Palestinians in Israel are employed in the construction sector, making this occupation closely associated with Palestinian identity. Within Israel, in 2001, the wages of Arab[32] men stood at 66% of those of Jewish men, falling to 54% in 2015.[33] Moreover, while overall labour force participation in Israel stands at 87% (for both men and women), it is 75% for Palestinian Israeli men and only 32% for women. The spatial and cultural separation between the two ethnic groups is significant. Ninety percent of Arabs live in exclusively Arab villages and small towns, while the remaining 10% live in distinct neighbourhoods within large Jewish cities; in most cases, they attend separate schools, speak a different language, avoid interfaith marriages, and are excluded from military service.[34]

Nevertheless, Arabs and Jews come into contact in workplaces, universities, public spaces, public transport, and elsewhere. As an alternative to the Histadrut, which does not effectively represent the interests of the former, multi-ethnic trade unions have emerged, focusing on Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel, mainly in the private sector: see the trade union Koah LaOvdim (the

32. Here, the term "Arabs" refers to Israeli citizens of Arab origin (or with similar language and cultural characteristics) who are not Jewish. This is the term preferred by the Israeli state in its official records and statistical surveys. They constitute approximately 21% of Israel's population: 82% Muslims, 9% Christians, and 9% Druze. In reality, a large proportion of Israeli Jews are also of Arab origin. The majority of "Arabs" self-identify as Palestinians, a national identity closely associated with a Muslim religious identity.

33. Data from the German Institute of Labor Economics (IZA).

34. Sammy Smooha, "The Arab-Jewish divide and Arab politics in Israel," The Palgrave International Handbook of Israel, Springer Nature Singapore, 2022.

third largest, with 20,000 to 30,000 members) and the slightly smaller but more radical MA'AN, which also organizes Palestinians working in Israeli settlements in the West Bank.[35] Smaller in size is the Arab Workers' Union, which has a strong women's section.

In the 1950s and 1960s, large numbers of Arab Jews (Mizrahim[36]) from North Africa and other countries of the Middle East began to arrive in the country. Like the Palestinians, they were treated as a cheap, marginalized labour force. They played a leading role in major uprisings and strikes, such as those of 1959 and 1971. The Aufheben group has dealt extensively with their struggles[37], particularly in relation to the organization the Israeli Black Panthers. Today, Mizrahim make up 45% of the Jewish population in Israel, while Jews of European origin, the Ashkenazim, account for 48%. In the 1990s, as Jews from Ethiopia and the former USSR—as well as new migrant workers from Thailand and the Philippines, who, of course, are not counted among Israeli citizens—began to arrive and take up the lowest-paid jobs, and as the national economy entered a phase of recovery, Mizrahim were able to move up the wage ladder, and a sizeable middle class emerged from their ranks.

Today the labour market remains deeply ethnicised, that is, racially stratified along ethnic lines. According to 2015 data, Ashkenazi Jews are paid wages 31% above the average, Mizrahim 14% above, Jews from the "Eastern bloc" 1% above, Arabs at 66% of the average, and Ethiopian Jews at 50%.[38] Beyond this ethnic stratification in Israel, there is also a sharp division within the Jewish community itself between Haredi and non-Haredi Jews.[39] The former are broadly situated within the same wage bracket as Arab citizens.[40]

However, Arabs in Israel, as well as in the West Bank and Gaza, are themselves also divided along class lines. A Palestinian business elite has emerged, even organised on a national/ethnic basis around organisations such as the Arab Business Club. In addition to organising workshops, conferences, seminars, and offering scholarships to students, it works to ensure better coordination of business activities inside and across borders—in the West Bank and Jordan. At the same time, it seeks to act as a lobby within the Israeli state in defence of the business interests of the Palestinian

35. Jules El-Khatib, "Israel's Trade Union Movement: Between Organizing and Silence," in the edited volume "If Not Us, Who?", Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2021.

36. They are also often referred to as Sephardim due to shared religious characteristics with the Jewish diaspora population that originated from the historic Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula (Sepharad being the Hebrew word for the Iberian Peninsula), to whom this designation traditionally applies. Mizrahi, meaning "Easterner" in Hebrew, was a term coined within Israel to label the Jews who arrived in Israel from the Muslim world.

37. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002

38. Lidia Averbukh, "Israel on the Road to the Orient? The Cultural and Political Rise of the Mizrahim," Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2017. The average is calculated including the large number of low-wage migrant workers without Israeli citizenship, primarily from Southeast Asian countries.

39. Haredi (or Haredim) is a religious—and not ethnic—designation for the most religiously and socially conservative segment of Judaism in Israel, which holds significant political power due to its demographic growth and electoral strength, and which predominantly supports Likud-led coalition governments. Haredim may be Ashkenazi, Sephardi, or Mizrahi. Each ethnic category within the Haredi population supports its own party; for example, Sephardi–Mizrahi Haredim predominantly support the Shas party, the third largest party in the Knesset, while Ashkenazi Haredim support United Torah Judaism. Although historically non-Zionist, and in fact largely viewing the Zionist movement as a secular, "heretical" project attempting to establish a state without the Messiah—something considered almost blasphemous from their theological perspective—they now participate in the state in order to secure privileges.

40. Hadas Fuchs and Avi Weiss, "Israel's Labour Market: An Overview", Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, 2018.

bourgeoisie, while its leading figures can simultaneously boast about how they use neoliberal means to bring about political changes in the interest of the broader Palestinian community.

Beyond the Palestinian bourgeois elites, a sizeable middle class has also developed. As a rough indicator, we can use self-employment rates, where "self-employed" also includes employers. According to 2008 data,[41] self-employment among the Arab population stood at 16%, only slightly lower than among first- and second-generation Ashkenazim (16.4% and 16.7% respectively), and slightly higher than among first- and second-generation Mizrahim (15.7% and 14% respectively). The corresponding figure for Jewish migrants from the former USSR was only 6%. Taken together, it is revealing that Arabs as employers broadly follow the same pattern as the general population in terms of how many workers they employ. The proportion of Arabs employing 3–9 people (9.9%) was slightly lower than that of the general population (11.3%), and the proportion employing 10 or more people (3%) was also somewhat lower than that of the general population (4.6%). From these figures, one can conclude that the exploitation of Palestinian workers and their relative wage suppression is not simply an "Israeli-Jewish affair."

The ethnicization of the labour market, as well as that of capitalist lobbies, is also reflected in the sphere of high politics. Various Knesset parties, which at different times participate in or lead governing coalitions, represent the interests of specific social groups. For example, the Shas party emerged as a hyper-conservative party defending the interests of Mizrahi-Haredi constituencies. More interesting, however, is the fact that Netanyahu's Likud is widely regarded as representing Mizrahi interests and has relied heavily on their votes since coming to power in 1977. The Hadash party (which also absorbed members of the Israeli Black Panthers) primarily represents the interests of Arab citizens of Israel from a left-wing perspective, while Ra'am represents the same constituency with an emphasis on Islamic identity and the promotion of a neo-traditional agenda. The party system in Israel is complex, but two dominant tendencies have shaped the country's politics in recent decades. On the one hand, there is a liberal-secular tendency, and on the other a fundamentalist-militarist one. Both reflect aspects of the country's ethnicised class structure.



41. Shlomo Swirski and Ariane Ophir, "Self-Employed Workers in Israel", Adva Center, 2014.

# 2.

# ON THE CONCEPT OF NEOLIBERAL APARTHEID

In Andy Clarno's *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa After 1994* (2017), which some of us—as members of the Assembly Against Biopower and Confinement—had discussed in the past and revisited in our self-education meetings, we found a useful theoretical tool. We incorporated it into our analysis, in the context of understanding the developments of the last twenty years beyond traditional or postmodern anti-colonial approaches. Clarno's analysis gave us some additional tools to escape the nation-centric anti-colonial narrative that regurgitates the third-worldist schemes of decades past,[42] which has resurfaced after October 7 with renewed fervor. This narrative, while useful (insofar as it documents the violence inflicted on and the dehumanization of the Palestinian population), fails to grasp that the Palestinian condition, and apartheid as a system of discipline and control, are not simply relations of national domination, but primarily *racial-capitalist stratifications within the working class* aimed at the more productive exploitation of the proletariat by the capitalist machine. Clarno's interpretation actually sits at the midpoint between one in terms of capitalist exploitation/dispossession and one in terms of national-colonial oppression. Nevertheless, his focus on the material dimension of power relations and his detailed treatment of the very specific class-racial relations in the region have given us a way to deconstruct the shallow nationalist binary *colonizer-colonized*, without dismissing or denying the lived experience of the oppressed. The revival of this simplistic **black-and-white dualism** disconnects apartheid from the logic of capitalist accumulation and reframes the struggle for social emancipation as a moral demand for "justice" articulated in the bourgeois-democratic terms of identity politics. It nationalizes every form of resistance and

42. In the 1950s, decolonization began with armed, mass struggles in Africa, Asia (Algeria, India, Vietnam, Ghana, Morocco, etc.), and the Middle East. Third-worldists of all stripes, particularly Maoists (with Stalinist Communist parties not far behind), made it their mission to support local elites, defining the independent nation-state as the goal of the struggle and the state-capitalist accumulation model of China (or the USSR) as the model of "liberation". This led to "realistic" strategic alliances, supporting nationalist organizations like the PLO, ANC, FRELIMO, MPLA, etc., with figures like Nasser, Assad, and Saddam being declared "friends of the world proletariat", and various nationalist regimes of state capitalism being christened "people's democracies" and "socialist countries". The political outcome was the nationalization of the anti-capitalist struggles of that period. This strategy, after further sinking the global left in the mire of defending the nation, buried the class line behind 'national self-determination' and sanctified the state as the instrument of liberation, leading to the creation of dozens of nation-states with socialist rhetoric that, in practice, crushed labor movements. In the 1970s, with the founding of independent states or the recognition of political movements as legitimate representatives of "peoples" (such as the PLO for the Palestinians), the combination of nation and people in anti-colonial garb constructed "resistance" as a symbolic and strategic motif. This included the heroization of the resistance fighter, the sanctification of national identity, and international spectacles of solidarity (such as flag adoption and cultural references). This Maoist-inspired reheated hodgepodge is what the latecomer "more catholic than the pope" anti-colonialists from the anarchist camp are trying to force-feed us today.

every expression from below, thereby concealing the possibility of a convergence between the Palestinian and Israeli struggles, absorbing even the most clear class dynamics into a simplistic **nation-versus-nation** narrative that wants us to forget the basics. This approach undermines any understanding of class differentiation within the Palestinian (and Israeli) populations, equating the oppressed worker with the Palestinian merchant of Ramallah. As long as we remain within this analytical framework and continue to describe Israel primarily as a "colonial" regime, we fail to grasp the core of the problem. In fact, our suspicion grows when this accusation is directed exclusively at this particular state and to no other. The Israeli state, like any modern state, functions first and foremost as a *capitalist state* – and particularly as a mechanism of neoliberal capitalist restructuring. *Neoliberal apartheid*, understood as a mode of organizing capitalist domination that combines exclusion and integration in order to reproduce a cheap and disciplined labor force, is not merely an ideologically driven system of racial segregation. Rather, it is a class mechanism that regulates *who* works, *where*, and under *what* conditions. Repression and precarity operate in tandem to secure exploitation under conditions of so-called "flexibility".

Clarno highlights the capitalist dimension of Israeli domination, demonstrating that policies of segregation, surveillance, and exclusion are not simply *residual features of racial regimes*. Instead, they function primarily as *methods for managing labor within the neoliberal context of accumulation and crisis* – drawing on, reproducing, and extending racial discrimination. Israeli domination should therefore not be understood as an "old-school" colonial form of oppression, but as a contemporary *method of managing the proletariat tailored to the neoliberal restructuring of capitalism* – one for which Israel has become an international model.

Clarno's framework emphasizes the class dimension of apartheid, showing how it enables the exploitation of certain workers without integrating them into civil society. It represents the pure form of capitalist barbarism in times of relative overpopulation, in which segregation is not ideological but functions as a material mechanism of accumulation.

According to Clarno, this dimension is also crucial in relation to South Africa, where following the formal abolition of apartheid, the state combined the racial-liberation rhetoric with the imposition of neoliberal capitalist restructuring. This process reproduced relations of inequality with the support of an emerging Black bourgeoisie. It is on this basis that Clarno draws parallels with Israel, situating both cases within broader global patterns of capitalist domination—patterns that are far removed not only from the Fordist model of labor exploitation, but, we would argue, even more so from the historical era of European colonialism itself. As Clarno notes, post-apartheid reforms in South Africa did not dismantle the structure of racist exploitation, but transformed it into a new form of neoliberal stratification. The so-called "post-apartheid" democratic regime thus re-established class exclusion through spatial separation and urban marginalization, precarious labor and overexploitation, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the management of poverty through repression and securitization, in collaboration with international capital. While the poor in the townships[43] continued to be marginalized and under surveillance, a decisive shift occurred: the post-apartheid regime produced a surplus population on a scale that did not exist under "classical" apartheid. The capital–labor relation thus shifted from a regime of partial integration to one of redundancy and marginalization, no longer enforced through racist legislation,

43. Suburban, urban, or semi-urban areas built near white cities (e.g., Johannesburg, Cape Town), where Black workers, who worked in the city but had no right to live there, were forced to settle. These were working-class ghettos in manageable proximity to the capitalist metropolis, designed for workers partially integrated into the system.

***Palestinian workers arrive at the first of the eight metal turnstiles they must pass through at the Sha'ar Ephraim checkpoint, which separates the West Bank and Israel.***

but through the reproduction of capital's domination over the means of life and labor, with the now flexible racialization being reproduced through the operation of the "laws of the market".

Similarly, in Israel, the logic of control is not based solely on ethnic or racial criteria. It does not operate like traditional apartheid, with fixed and absolute boundaries between Israeli citizens and Palestinians, akin to the rigid racial separation between "whites" and "blacks". Rather, it functions as a coordinated set of institutions, technologies, infrastructures, and procedures that can be selectively activated according to the needs of capital – a system from which the Palestinian bourgeoisie is often largely exempt. It is a functional structure of domination, not static or one-dimensional but flexible and managerial in character. The Israeli regime is not simply a matter of military force or occupation law; it is a system of flows, control, surveillance, and evaluation that assigns people to categories (employable/useless, dangerous/disciplined). The system does not simply throw Palestinians out; it classifies them, registers them, renders them surplus or only temporarily tolerable: The production of surplus population is a critical function of neoliberal capitalism and 21st-century apartheid *does not operate through static, legal boundaries, but through fluid, differentiated forms of surveillance and exclusion*. This regime is structured around the **work-permit system**: a device for controlling labor power and for enforcing political discipline, operating as a tool of collective punishment, since permits are revoked en masse in retaliation for attacks or collective mobilizations.[44] It functions simultaneously as a tool of constant political control (for example, Palestinians with a "security file" for participation in strikes, trade-union activity, or with relatives involved in resistance organizations are excluded from the permit regime and classified as "security threats"), as a lever for recruiting snitches, and as

44. In 2016, 2,771 permits were revoked in Bani Naim, and tens of thousands more were cancelled following an attack in Tel Aviv. That same year, again after an attack in Tel Aviv, Israel revoked 83,000 Palestinian entry permits. After October 7, 2023, Israel massively cancelled the permits of approximately 160,000 workers from the West Bank and Gaza, including 3,200 workers who were arrested after being trapped inside Israel itself.

a temporary mechanism of integration—since eligibility for permits is granted to those who shut up and work obediently without making demands. It is no coincidence that the boundaries of apartheid are fluid; some Palestinians can cross with work permits, others are completely excluded, and others are recruited by the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, which acts as a subcontractor of Israeli domination, undertaking the surveillance and discipline of its own communities. The boundaries of apartheid shift constantly to meet the often contradictory needs of the Israeli state for labor power and discipline, regulating the flow of people by selectively integrating some while turning others into surplus population. It is a system of meticulous population management, in which social position is distributed according to the demands of capital rather than, necessarily, any narrow legal or national criteria.

The West Bank is the terrain in which this regime operates as a network of coordinated surveillance, selective integration, and controlled mobility. The Palestinian Authority, NGOs, the EU, and inter-state agreements together produce a surveillance zone with a "human face", in which Palestinian labor is integrated only as necessary—and only when necessary.

On the other hand, Gaza is the "negative complement" of this regime. It is not a terrain of integration, but a repository of surplus population. Its usefulness lies less in providing labor power and more in "producing a threat" and serving as a constant reminder of the "necessity" of the Israeli surveillance and security regime. Gaza is not entirely external to the Israeli regime; it forms part of a special mode of domination that aims at a systematic alternation between devastation and temporary "calm" (at least until October 7). On the one hand, this ensures that no time or space is given for social resistance to develop within Gaza, which is kept trapped in the constant struggle for immediate survival, while any and all resistance remains fragmented, nationalized, or purely militarized. On the other hand, the constant "threat" posed by Gaza, and the legitimization of its military repression, also exerts a disciplinary effect within Israel, consolidating consensus around state strategies and suspending class conflict under the pretext of "national unity against the enemy". In Gaza, repression is not accompanied by integration, but by exclusion and military violence.

The development of security protocols and surveillance technologies in the West Bank and Gaza—through drones, barriers, cameras, and data collection—constitutes a field of potential profitability for capital. Contrary to views that hold that it was this profitability (derived from the production of surveillance technology) that led to the need for the prison called Gaza, we reverse the direction of causality and argue that it is the need to manage islamicized palestinian nationalism that produces these capitalist means, and the possibility of profit emerges later.[45]

45. Surveillance is not the reason for the birth of apartheid—apartheid is primarily a response by capital to the need to manage populations that it cannot integrate productively without jeopardizing its power. In neoliberal capitalism, however, surveillance becomes structural: not merely a means of repression, but a basic mechanism

Capital did not establish apartheid in order to sell cameras; but *once* it had established it, it commodified and exported them. Apartheid, from a system of segregation, also becomes a means of extracting surplus value—not only from Palestinian workers, but also from labor in the industry that produces their surveillance.

The dominant political narrative within the international Left—and even more so within the local radical (antagonistic) movement—remains trapped at a level of analysis that recognizes only national categories, as if internal class differentiations did not exist; as if *Palestinian elites* had not emerged alongside Israeli ones, fully integrated into the system of exclusion, benefiting from international funding and the mechanisms of NGO-ization. Far from pursuing any vision of liberation, the Palestinian Authority functions as a *managerial authority*: a "*national mediator of repression*" within a system in which repression itself is "outsourced".[46]

If we want to grasp clearly the logic of apartheid as a capitalist mechanism, it is enough to follow the thread that begins in South Africa and extends to the recent state management of the pandemic (2020–2022). The management of COVID-19—particularly through the policy of the vaccination passes—constituted a form of class discipline, not because a particular "identity" was targeted, but because the state sought to delimit which bodies could participate in production. This was neither a case of thanatopolitics nor some authoritarian aberration, but rather the incorporation of medical biopolitics into the capitalist logic of valorization. The "health-biopolitical apartheid" of the pandemic years was not based solely on an ideology of exclusion, but on a method for evaluating and dividing the working class according to our compliance with the state's cheap and disciplinary management of the pandemic. *"State programs of mass/universal vaccination […] involved the most direct form of control over the collective body of labor—whether in places of work or of consumption—through the imposition of a fluid apartheid, in which today's (forcibly) 'compliant–vaccinated' citizen can at any moment be excluded from spheres of social life"* as some of us wrote three years ago.[47]

For years, Israeli apartheid has operated through a logic of flow control, personalization, outsourcing, and through a network of management and control systems (the Palestinian Authority, the police, NGOs, development programs), without ever ceasing to be a *mechanism of exploitation, with the military as its executive branch*. Over the past two years, Israeli apartheid has once again returned—this time far more decisively and with sustained intensity—to brutal mass military violence, to the annihilation of populations and the militaristic management of Gaza and the West Bank. This does not stand in contradiction to its earlier neoliberal face; on the contrary, it *exposes its internal contradictions*. Neoliberal capitalism, in its Israeli variant, bet that it could secure "stability" through deals with the Palestinian Authority, funded projects and technological means of

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of selection, discipline, and marginalisation, and thus a requirement for the reproduction of the regime itself. It is no longer a technical application; it is the material basis of neoliberal-biopolitical domination over the surplus population.

46. The state outsources surveillance to private security companies, repression to contractors or the Palestinian Authority, healthcare and education to NGOs, and "peace" itself to international donors and programs. Domination itself is being privatized, becoming more flexible, fragmented, and economically profitable.

47. For more, see the brochure "Critique of Separation 2 – The Role of Fluid Neoliberal Apartheid in the Restructuring and Dismantling of the National Health System and Social-Class Resistance to This Development", Assembly Against Biopower and Confinement, 2022.

control, digital applications[48] and barriers, and by cooperating with the "good" Palestinian managerial class, while managing the working class as superfluous. But capital has limits: it cannot *manage life without violence, nor permanent crisis through discipline alone*.


***Protest by Matzpen against apartheid. Matzpen, the Israeli socialist organization, never had more than a few dozen active members. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was considered a real threat to Israel's political and social consensus. Most of Matzpen's members were born in Israel and came from the core of Israeli society. Their struggle against Zionism and the occupation, as well as their contacts with Palestinian and European leftist activists, led to threats, slander, and political and social isolation.***

48. In the case of Israeli apartheid, "applications" refer to digital surveillance and tracking platforms used by the military and security services to identify, locate, and assess Palestinians. These include facial recognition technologies and big data analysis deployed at checkpoints, city entrances, and labor flows, as well as digital databases that classify Palestinians based on their "dangerousness" or "fitness for work" (e.g., "Red Wolf", "Blue Wolf", as revealed by Breaking the Silence and B'Tselem). Additionally, travel permit application platforms require Palestinians to undergo digital verification, background checks, classification etc. in order to pass through checkpoints.

# PART II

# 3.

## From the End of Labor Zionism to the Palestinian semi-state

In our analysis of capitalism in Israel in chapter 1—focusing on its form as a method that joined land, labour, and capital into a nationalized bundle—we brought out the tangled and contradictory social relations driving its socio-economic developments. In this section, we zero in on key turning points inside Israel, tracing its productive reconfiguration after 1967, how this reshaped class composition, and how it crystallized into a conflict between two bourgeois blocs within the Israeli social formation: one secular and hi-tech, oriented toward the West; the other rooted in the outskirts of major cities, more lumpenized, tied to expansionism in the East, and forming the electoral base of the Netanyahu government. After 1967, settlement emerged as a mechanism for reintegrating a fractured Jewish proletariat through national expansion, that is, as a response to the acute crisis of Israel's social contract. This expansion should therefore not be read solely as an instrument of territorial control, but also as an answer to the social question: a strategy for absorbing the struggles and contradictions that have permeated, and continue to permeate, Israel's proletarian body.

The intifadas were decisive moments that accelerated the crisis of Israel's model of accumulation and intensified the pressure for restructuring. We will examine more closely the neoliberal restructuring of the economy—specifically, when and how the collapse of Labour Zionism and the neoliberal turn became irreversibly bound to the racist regime—in order to understand Israel's management of the Palestinian question through the historical development of its accumulation regime. This dimension receives less attention in the interviews with E. Minasian (see Appendix I), whose analysis focuses primarily on the West Bank. In the same period that a Jewish-Israeli business elite amassed extraordinary wealth, Israel's working class faced cuts to social provision and sustained assaults on trade unions. Meanwhile, a small Palestinian elite, closely tied to the Palestinian Authority, has also enriched itself, even as the overwhelming majority of Palestinians face mass unemployment, land seizures, and continuous, unrelenting repression. The Palestinian proletariat is thus subjected to exploitation and domination by both the Israeli and the Palestinian bourgeoisie—which is hierarchically subordinate to Israel's, yet structurally complementary to it.

### *The productive reconstruction in Israel with the incorporation of the new territories of '67*

Israel's accumulation regime, especially after 1967, was founded on **war** and the **military-industrial sector**, alongside the direct **dispossession of land** inhabited or cultivated by Palestinians.[49] From this point on, the **racialized model** of accumulation—expressed in a labour market stratified along racial and ethnic lines, and expanded after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to incorporate Palestinian workers from the newly conquered territories—would operate in lockstep with the **war-driven model** of the economy.

The private sector expanded to meet the escalating demands of the military, while the bulk of the public sector was directed towards the war economy. Employment in the military-linked industries, however, was restricted to conscriptable population[50]—thus excluding Palestinian citizens of Israel, and even more rigidly, Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. **Well-paid industrial jobs** were structurally **reserved for Jews**. As Aufheben notes:

> In the face of these internal [the proletariat] and external [the neighboring Arab states] threats the continued survival of the Zionist State demanded unity of all Israeli Jews—both occidental and oriental. But to unite all Jews behind the Israeli State required that the previously excluded oriental Jews were integrated within an extended labour Zionist settlement. Conveniently [for the state], the very same circumstances that demanded the expansion of the labour Zionist settlement also provided the conditions necessary to carry out such a major social restructuring.[51]

The occupation of the new territories forced fresh questions onto the Israeli political stage: **territorial reach was expanding, and with it, the demographic composition was shifting**.[52] The resulting tension divided the Labor Zionist camp itself. The Histadrut clung to the doctrine of the "conquest of labor", insisting that the Arab population remain spatially and economically segregated from the Jewish workers. Another faction within the Labor Party, by contrast, openly pushed for tapping Palestinians as a reservoir of cheap labor for Israel (see the Dayan line). This strategic wavering—unfolding against the backdrop of the Palestinian struggles that broke out across the newly occupied territories in 1976 and 1977, and alongside deeper changes in the economy as both the public sector and the Histadrut were losing ground—paved the way for the first-ever electoral victory of the right-wing Likud in 1977, the party now led by Netanyahu. Unlike the social democrats, Likud entered the scene with a far less hazy compass on the question of the new conquests: **annexation** was its explicitly declared objective.

This "vision" took material shape in two concrete policy directions. First, a **state-organised program of mass, systemic settlement**—no longer confined to sparsely inhabited or peripheral zones, as before, but pursued far more aggressively, including deep inside densely populated

49. Military spending was an integral part of the state budget and the accumulation process from the outset, but from 1967 onwards it rose to unprecedented levels and remained extremely high even after 1973. At its peak, defense spending reached 30% of GDP, with half of that going toward arms imports.

50. Palestinians in Israel who remained within the 1948 borders—and who have Israeli citizenship—are not required to serve in the military, although they can enlist voluntarily, which the majority avoids for political reasons.

51. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002. Clarifications in brackets are ours.

52. After 1967, one third of those subject to Israeli rule were Palestinians (Aufheben, ibid.). Furthermore, the growth rate of the Arab population was and remains higher than that of the Jewish population.

Arab areas.[53] Second, a deliberate acceleration of the dismantling of the Palestinian economy, paired with **a radical reshaping the productive infrastructure of the newly occupied territories**, integrating it into Israel's accumulation circuit—not as an autonomous economic sphere, but as a functional appendage to production inside Israel proper. In practice, this involved restructuring the agricultural economy of the new acquisitions so it served Israel's highly specific needs.[54] At the same time, Israeli manufacturers leveraged subcontracting to set up workshops and small-scale factories across the occupied territories, tightly circumscribed in their activities, and geared mainly toward producing textiles, garments, and footwear. The subcontractors were often Palestinian capitalists, harshly exploiting the cheap, vulnerable and politically exposed local labor.[55]

Meanwhile, through the 1970s, the core of the Israeli economy was also being restructured, coming to rely ever more heavily on Palestinian workers crossing the Green Line.[56] At the same time, the newly occupied territories themselves became fresh markets for Israeli capital—sites not only of production, but also of realization of surplus-value. A total de jure annexation, however, was never pursued, precisely to avoid extending to West Bank and Gaza Palestinians the same political and labor rights that Israel's Palestinian citizens were formally granted after 1967. The populations of these new acquisitions were instead governed under military law. Palestinian workers did enter the accumulation process—as a cheap, precarious labor force powering rapid expansion in construction and agriculture on both sides of the Green Line. Yet, for Palestinians specifically from the West Bank and Gaza, their inclusion in any enlarged social contract was categorically ruled out. The reproduction of their labor power remained outside the Keynesian regulation of Labor Zionism (or whatever had remained of it), and was secured through the lowest-cost, most rudimentary means.

The upheavals triggered by the conquest of new territories and their effective economic incorporation—through the mechanisms we've outlined—became the new material foundation of Israel's nationalized class relations that developed ever since and until the Oslo Accords. It was within this web of productive relations that the First Intifada erupted in 1987. At that stage, Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank were not marginal to the Israeli economy—they were integrated as an indispensable productive force. The condition of a *surplus proletariat* was largely absent, and the Palestinian working class still wielded significant power in the workplace. During the same period, the groundwork was being laid for Likud's **doctrine of full territorial annexation**. That political objective has never truly gone away—it has resurfaced again and again, right up to the present, even as its form has shifted along with the conjuncture.

53. Théo Cosme, "Moyen-Orient 1945-2002: Histoire d'une lutte de classes", Senonevero, 2008, pp. 140-1

54. In the West Bank and Gaza, farming methods and crops themselves changed radically. A huge portion of arable land and control of water passed into Israeli hands. The goal was now for agricultural production to meet the needs of the population in Israel itself, as well as its export activities, in terms of mass production.

55. In an interview with a Gaza resident in the 1980s, we read: "People prefer to work in Israel rather than to work for the capitalists here in Gaza — in the Star and Seven Up factories for example. Here, you work a twelve hour day with half an hour for lunch which you aren't paid for. You don't get overtime payment. You get laid off just like that and there is no way of protecting your rights. There are no unions with any bite and you can't complain because the whole system is sewn up by this tribal network of Gazan notables". Paul Cossali and Clive Robson, "Stateless in Gaza", Zed Press, 1986, p. 55-56.

56. In 1980, 34% of the working population of the occupied territories worked in Israel. This represents 57% of Palestinian salaried workers. Théo Cosme, "Moyen-Orient 1945-2002: Histoire d'une lutte de classes", Senonevero, 2008, pp. 144-5.

### *Crisis and neoliberalisation in Israel*

The contradictions that the Israeli production model faced in this new period marked one side of the end of Labor Zionism. The other side was the protracted crisis of the national economy itself. In the context of the global capitalist restructuring set in motion at the turn of the 1970s—sealed by the 1973 world recession—the Zionist vision of national economic self-sufficiency hit a wall as Israel's trade balance went into the red. Like the rest of the capitalist world and its global peripheries, the Israeli state shifted toward export-driven economic activity, with policies that the Labor Party had already begun to implement. Yet soaring military expenditure and ballooning sovereign debt inevitably weighed on the region's capacity for capital valorization. The Labor Zionist arrangement—built on the welfare state, collectivized production (the kibbutz system), and social-chauvinist claims to a more just national distribution of produced value—reached its historical limits when capital profitability in Israel dropped abruptly and the economy was led to a rampant inflationary crisis by the end of the 1970s.

For Israel, therefore, the **transition from (military) Keynesianism to neoliberalism** in the 1980s and 1990s meant opening up the economy to foreign trade without restrictions,[57] austerity and cutback policies, the abolition of protective tariffs, privatizations (ports, telecommunications), climbing public and private debt, high-tech start-ups[58] that have little need for low-paid unskilled Palestinian workers, thousands of layoffs and unemployment. Neoliberal restructuring within the state of Israel brought Israeli capital into constant conflict with the Israeli Jewish working class—expressed in wildcat strikes, general strike by the Histadrut, etc.[59]

As for Israel's export activity, apart from agricultural products that were produced on both sides of the Green Line, in the mid-1970s, mass production began of electronics, chemicals, and processed metals and components for industrial and military use, machinery, transportation equipment, medical equipment, etc. This shift wasn't spontaneous—it was actively steered by state policy through the consolidation of a military–scientific–industrial complex that promoted the production of high-tech commodities. The rise of this new technology-driven economy was accompanied by privatisation and deregulation. By 1982, Israel had become the world's seventh-largest arms exporter[60]—not because of some innate or "special" cultural inclination toward military violence, but as a pragmatic adaptation, among other things, to a global conjuncture marked by crisis and upheaval, where closed, inward-looking economic models were no longer viable. Even so, Israel's economy continued to lean heavily on external financing, primarily from the United States and the Jewish diaspora. It lacked the capacity to build an industrial economy of intensive accumulation as competitive as that of the U.S. or Japan, yet it also could not function like the "third-world" economies, which underpinned their entire industrial output on vast pools of cheap labor. Israel banked on a highly trained workforce and high-value-added cutting-edge industries, thus offering a channel for assimilating class demands through careerism, exclusively

57. That's pretty much how the fairy tale about the Zionist social democratic national economy, "Zionist solidarity", etc., ended.

58. Nicknamed the "Start-Up Nation", Israel currently has more than 7,000 active start-up companies. At least 200 of these are related to cybersecurity, ranking it second in the world in exports of such services (social control, espionage, data monitoring). Israel also ranks first in the world in terms of R&D spending as a percentage of GDP (approximately 5%), according to data from the Israeli "innovation hub" CivicLabs.

59. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002.

60. Théo Cosme, "Moyen-Orient 1945-2002: Histoire d'une lutte de classes", Senonevero, 2008, p. 147.

for Israeli citizens.[61] Around the high-tech sector in urban centers, new social strata emerged whose interests aligned with a liberal, civic-democratic vision, where trade and innovation—not conquest or plunder—formed the core of their political identity. Yet the military dimension of Israel's economy and the apartheid regime are simply **the other face** of this high-tech liberal model. These contradictions in Israel's material existence are most clearly expressed today in the deep internal rift running through Israeli society. A rift that, as we shall see below, erupted with full force in 2023, in the months leading up to the current asymmetrical war.

Until 1985, the Israeli government—which for a period of time came to be a coalition between Likud and the Labor Party—was locked in a battle with runaway inflation. Even after relative monetary stability had been achieved in 1986, other problems such as soaring unemployment were beginning to surface. In 1985, Israel signed a free trade agreement with the United States and adopted the Emergency Economic Stabilization Plan, which deregulated trade and investment, cut social spending, and pushed wages downward.[62]

Israel's crisis inevitably impacted the condition of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza: The existence of a common currency—the shekel—meant inflation affected both sides of the Green Line, at a time when taxes climbed and wages in agriculture, construction, and food services were pushed down.[63] The occupied territories bore a large part of the burden of the crisis and the Israeli military command, aware of the volatility this produced, rolled out the "Iron Fist" policy: a policy of severe repression, first tested in occupied southern Lebanon, then extended to the West Bank. The First Intifada, which broke out in 1987, stands as the clearest response to this economic and political burden. Essentially, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, Israeli capital was caught in a **drawn-out crisis of reproduction of class relations**. The story had two inseparable fronts: the generalized discontent and resistance of an ethnically over-fragmented proletariat, and the hard limits on economic growth imposed by Israel's productive structure and its commercial-geographic constraints. In reality we are talking about two sides of the same thing: the capitalist relation as concretely crystallized in the Israel–Palestine social formation.

## *The turning point of the First Intifada and the post-Oslo era*

The First Intifada erupts in the occupied territories under these circumstances, with the Palestinian proletariat playing the leading role. It pushed Israel's Jewish elite to the realization that they could no longer rely on the unruly Palestinian labor power as casually as in the past. Instead, they turned to the mass importation of immigrants from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe for the low-paying jobs in agriculture and construction (from 1993 to 1996, approximately 100,000 immigrants). The pressure to sideline (non-Israeli) Palestinians from the Israeli labor market was then magnified dramatically by a second, far larger influx: over a million Russian Jews immigrated to Israel after the collapse of the state-capitalist formation of the USSR. The insurrectionary characteristics that the struggles of the Palestinian proletariat were acquiring, were threatening both the Palestinian bourgeoisie and the Israeli state (taking into account the need to balance the

61. The CivicLabs website informs us that "9% of the workforce in Israel consists of highly skilled technology workers".

62. Gershon Shafir, Yoav Peled, "Being Israeli: the dynamics of multiple citizenship", Cambridge University Press, 2002.

63. Théo Cosme, "Moyen-Orient 1945-2002: Histoire d'une lutte de classes", Senonevero, 2008, p. 240.

opposing factions within itself). Their common need to assimilate those struggles led to the compromise of the Oslo Accords.

Through the Oslo Accords, Israel seeks to transfer all responsibility for the management of this proletariat to another administrative apparatus, the Palestinian Authority, with the PLO at the helm. For the PLO, which after the 1991 Gulf War found itself isolated and stripped of its last major ally, Iraq, "Oslo" was an attempt to capitalize on the legitimization it had achieved by methodically nationalizing the First Intifada. But the Palestinian workforce in the occupied territories was increasingly treated as a *"surplus" population* by the Israeli state, gradually fenced in by a network of biopolitical control and anti-insurgency technologies. From then on, Palestinian employment in Israel serves the Israeli capital *only to a limited degree* and becomes a tool of *disciplining* and *blackmailing* of the Palestinian working class.[64] The complementary relation between the economies of Israel proper and that of the Palestinian periphery was already becoming partially obsolete. Thus, at the same time that the possibility of having an administrator of the Palestinian labor power was ensured, there was no longer a need for such an administrator. Although the Palestinian Authority may retain some administrative role *as well*, it predominantly assumes a policing role—instead of a "social welfare" one—in order to discipline a proletariat with very high unemployment rates; a precariat. But how long can an authority with such characteristics remain legitimate? Israel has planted a time bomb, or rather a minefield, that could be triggered at any moment. And this is exactly what happened on the turn of the century with the Second Intifada, and it keeps happening to this day. Precisely because the Palestinian Authority is a double-edged sword for Israel, the latter has had a "schizophrenic" relationship with it until October 7: on the one hand, it undermines it (in some cases, by reinforcing Hamas) and, on the other, it continues to need it.

The Oslo Accords also paved the way for the normalization of Israel's relations with other states—most notably with Jordan. The 1990s marked a boom in Israel's commercial activity and capital exports, fueled by access to new markets in India, China, the Gulf, Indonesia, and Latin America. Israel was leaving behind the period of prolonged crisis that stretched from the late '70s to the end of the '80s—the **"prehistory" of its neoliberalization** and entering the **golden age of high-tech capital**, opening up to American multinationals, surging foreign trade, a completely deregulated labor market, and the dramatic impoverishment of a large part of the Israeli population, with inequality climbing to record highs. At that moment, social democracy had essentially lost its raison d'être, having lost its role in legitimizing the austerity policies and neoliberal transition it had undertaken in the 1980s. And yet, even in this comparatively "peaceful" period (by the region's standards[65]), the Israeli state never shed its militaristic character—among other reasons, because it is closely linked to the settlement policy which carried on unabated.

## *Settlement before and after Oslo*

Settlement policy in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and—until 2005—in Gaza has been a core social policy instrument of the Israeli capitalist state, complementing the form of welfare state that centers around wage labor where the integration of the working class happens through wages, social security, and benefits. In the different stages of development of Israeli capitalism,

64. Palestinians working in Israel or the settlements make up 17% or more of the employed population of the West Bank.

65. The Israeli army was in Lebanon from 1982 to 2000.

the state utilized land redistribution to integrate and discipline segments of the Jewish proletariat that it never intended to fully incorporate in the Zionist social contract. Later on, private capital was invited into the game of ground rent on settled territories, cementing the foothold of Israeli capital there and bringing land ever deeper into the sphere of capital valorization. In this sense, settlements as an instrument of social policy are not a recent deviation of the past 20–25 years, although their expansion did surge most dramatically in that period. The number of settlements legalized since October 7 is higher than any moment since 1967, accompanied by extensive settlement operations into West Bank refugee camps (demolitions, gates, checkpoints etc.) and lethal settler attacks in Palestinian villages.

From 1950 through the late 1990s, settlement was a centrally engineered project of the Israeli state, still at the time supported by a rudimentary welfare state: settlers were granted housing, employment pathways, loans, schooling for their children, and access to public transport. Initially, the state turned a blind eye to the fact that many of the Jews it had relocated en masse from Arab countries[66]—dragging them to participate in Israel's foundation—were seizing land that had belonged to Palestinians displaced in 1948. These seizures were in a gray zone between illegality and legality (with respect to the laws of the Israeli state), as the land was formally confiscated and distributed by the state through the Absentees' Property Law. The state was the ultimate planner at that stage: it distributed populations, built infrastructure, and controlled social mobility.

By the late 1960s, a substantial layer of Mizrahim—left stranded at the edges of Israel's welfare system, marked by mass unemployment and excluded from public healthcare and mainstream Jewish educational institutions—had entered a phase of radicalization. This found expression in radical social movements led by groups such as the Israeli Black Panthers (1971-1972), which mobilized against racial discrimination and the systematic exclusion of impoverished Jewish communities. Within the context of these movements, homeless Jews began squatting in the wealthy suburbs of Ashkenazi Jews. Yet these movements were defeated, and the Israeli state drew on this defeat to scale up settlement. From the early 1980s onward, as the social-integrative capacities of Labor Zionism decomposed, settlement in the annexed territories became an increasingly central instrument for integrating the most economically precarious layers of the Jewish working class into the Zionist state. By 1985, settlement construction was pursued as a remedy for the shortage of affordable housing inside Israel proper. Likud itself acknowledged the dual payoff: settlers not only alleviated internal social pressure, but also supported the long-term territorial goals of *"Greater Israel"*.[67] In this period, settlers were not land purchasers but land recipients, most of whom constituted a depreciated assimilated labor force, while some were smallholder farmers and small bosses functioning as a "shield" for the state. Settling on the annexed Palestinian land of the West Bank and Gaza integrated them into the repressive apparatus of the state and weakened the prospects for the development of social struggles inside Israel.

The same dynamic continued in the years after the First Intifada and the Oslo Accords, when the state faced the pressing challenge of housing and socially integrating more than a million Russian-Jewish immigrants—many of whom it could not incorporate into the welfare and waged exploitation system, especially in a period when wages were being slashed by neoliberal reforms. Israel followed the same strategy, relying on the dual function of the settlement regime: relocating

66. We are referring to the Mizrahim, whom the Israeli state initially placed in ma'abarot, that is, temporary concentration camps with tents or huts, on the outskirts of cities or in deserted areas.

67. "Behind the 21st Century Intifada", Aufheben #10, 2002

new workers into new settlements, offering them low-cost housing, and channeling them into employment tied to construction, infrastructure, and the military economy, while simultaneously using them to demographically reinforce Israeli presence in the West Bank and Gaza.

In the West Bank, Israel's post-Oslo strategy involved concentrating the Palestinian population into enclaves in Areas A and B (40% of the territory) and illegally —according to International Law— settling inside Area C (the remaining 60%) through land confiscations, home demolitions, construction of settlements and roads reserved for settlers alone. Area C includes not only Palestinian homes, but also farmland and pastures, cut off from the main towns and villages, and turned into scattered 'islands' in a sea of military rule, left vulnerable to the expansionist drive of Israeli capital and its state, through settlement. The expansion of settlements created opportunities for state and private investment (by the Israeli state, Zionist organizations, and international capital in collaboration with Palestinian capitalists) in infrastructure, security, and real estate. The violent and severe urbanization of Palestinian villages was the result of the coercive displacement of Palestinian populations and the massive surplus labor force. Housing costs for local proletarians spiralled far faster than (Palestinian) wages could ever keep up with while widespread unemployment created a reserve of unemployed workers forced to accept the psychological burden of working on the construction of Israeli settlements on land that, only shortly before, had been worked by themselves, their relatives, or their neighbors. As we will detail below, apartheid in the annexed territories rests not only on direct control of the land through settlements, but also of resources (water) and agricultural products.

After 2000, the Israeli welfare state entered a new cycle of **restructuring**. The old corporatist model of collective bargaining through the Histadrut had already collapsed. Austerity, privatisation, and the hollowing-out of public services led to a partial retrenchment of social policy. Land that had been state-owned became commodified through reforms in the Israel Land Administration (later replaced by the Israel Land Authority), such as the Israel Lands Reform (2009). "Settlement incentive" programs (2011) facilitated the transfer of land and the settling of the West Bank. Around state institutions and NGOs (Israel Land Authority, Jewish National Fund, Amana settlement organization), a rent network was established that distributes resources to the Jewish population, structurally excluding Palestinians. This model opened up a new frontier of accumulation, inviting real estate companies, contractors, and construction companies such as Shikun & Binui, Danya Cebus (a subsidiary of Africa Israel Investments), as well as international funds that invest through opaque corporate structures (REITs[68]). Land that had once been publicly owned or expropriated by the military was now passing into private hands.

The state partially withdraws from the direct planning of settlements. Rather than constructing new settlements from the ground up, it increasingly outsources their construction to private actors: religious organisations, settler NGOs with paramilitary features, real-estate developers, and building contractors. Settlements are no longer offered as social housing but are instead bought and sold on the market. What the state now offers in place of "traditional" social policy is a package of tax exemptions, subsidized mortgages (often channeled indirectly rather than through explicit state budgets), and access to rent-free land, infrastructure, and development subsidies.

68. Real Estate Investment Trusts: favorably taxed entities exempt from corporate tax and legally protected by the host country when investmenting offshore.


***The name ISRACA stands for Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee (Abroad). Its two main active groups published their bulletins in London and Paris (other groups existed for shorter periods in Germany and the United States). Members of Matzpen were active in each group. Matzpen was a socialist, anti-Zionist organization in Israel that influenced and supported the Israeli Black Panthers, a movement of the 1970s composed of Mizrahi Jews from Arab and North African countries who faced discrimination from the then-dominant Ashkenazi population. The Matzpen group focused on class issues, which it linked to anti-Zionist principles.***

The settler social base is not a passive recipient of benefits, but an active agent of accumulation at the local level. One arena of this accumulation is agriculture: the Israeli state extends loans and rural-development subsidies to settlers, while electricity and irrigation are prioritised for settlements, at the same time when Palestinians are denied reliable access to water. Religious tourism and eco-tourism form another arena. Settler associations build hotels, eco-tourism hubs, and agritourism businesses, funded through the Ministry of Tourism's 'development areas' budget, which channels money directly to the settlements. New settlers, moreover, receive loans from NGO investment funds to set themselves up as self-employed micro-entrepreneurs. The state acts as a guarantor of accumulation, providing investment security, military protection, and legal cover through military orders and administrative measures, while also facilitating the export of settlement products and laundering their origin, since the settlement regime is illegal under international law. It further secures the legalisation of settlements through retroactive rulings and exceptional legislation.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the number of settlers has increased dramatically. In 2024, they exceeded 740,000—around 500,000 in the West Bank and 240,000 in East Jerusalem—an increase of about 15% compared to 2019. Public spending on settlers far surpasses the national average, while, as we explained, Palestinian housing costs have skyrocketed, exacerbating poverty. For Israeli capital, settlement-linked revenues reach up to $30 billion annually. For the Palestinian economy, cumulative losses between 2000 and 2020 are estimated at more than $50 billion—roughly three times its current GDP. Settlements are increasingly decentralised compared to the previous state-planning era, more tightly coupled to ground rent and privatized security inside gated communities. This new phase is also the most violent: settlers, armed by the state, organize into paramilitary formations that operate with relative autonomy—blocking roads, enforcing territorial control, and carrying out attacks on Palestinians according to their own agenda.

The settler population does not constitute a homogeneous social category.[69] Nevertheless, its different strata all benefit from state subsidies, while the numerous small bosses among them reap substantial gains from cheap Palestinian labour. Most Palestinian construction workers employed in the settlements—between 30,000 and 40,000 workers—are paid below the statutory minimum wage under Israeli law and earn roughly half the wages of their Israeli counterparts. Although Israelis make up around half of the workforce in the settlements, they account for only 7.5% of manual labour positions and are predominantly employed in managerial and supervisory roles.[70] Given the settlers' longstanding involvement in displacement, violent attacks, and the systematic intimidation of Palestinians, an internationalist convergence of proletarian struggles in the West Bank is rendered almost structurally impossible, with the potential exception of the industrial zones.

The settler petty-bourgeois strata—even when they remain in a precarious economic position—are incorporated into the sphere of land rent and to that extent, they are objectively part of the accumulation mechanism. The section of the Israeli working class that accepts to work in the settlements, that constitute the poorer settler strata, finds itself in a privileged position. They solve the unemployment problem by working in settlement projects and they also gain access to affordable housing in the settlements, at a time when the cost of living and rents in the urban centres of Israel proper are spiraling out of control. Yet this is not merely a matter of economics. Many settlers are driven by nationalist and religious motivations, conceiving settlement as a mission; this shapes their choice of location and solidifies the social cohesion of the settler class. Their role is socially and politically crucial. These are Smotrich's voters.

The key point is that settlement policy does not merely provide social support for territorial annexation; it also produces class fragmentation. The Palestinian working class is forced into the position of a super-exploited proletariat, excluded from property and rights. On the other side, even the poorest settler strata gain access to state benefits and land and, precisely on this basis, often act ruthlessly as paramilitary gangs carrying out murderous pogroms against Palestinians.

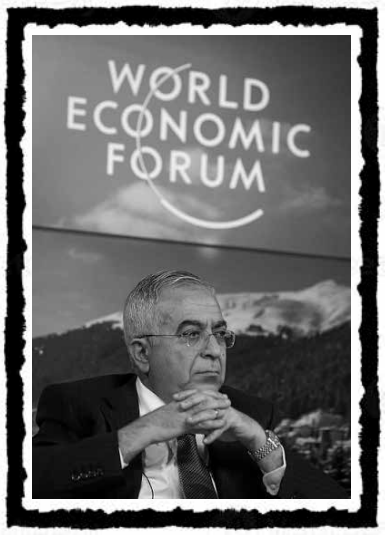
The neoliberal restructuring is intertwined with the racialization of labor. Settlements operate as a mechanism through which accumulation is organized along spatial and racial lines. The redistribution of land across Palestine/Israel is therefore not simply a settlement strategy, but a **class strategy**. It functions as a mechanism of class integration, upward mobility, and social reproduction under a state of crisis—one grounded not only in wage labor, but also in the selective access to land, housing, and land rent to the exclusive benefit of the Jewish population.

### *The new Palestinian semi-state*

With the Oslo Accords, Israel succeeded in offloading the cost of reproduction of the Palestinian working class onto the Palestinians themselves and the international community. At the same time, the newly formed Palestinian bourgeoisie believed that the state-like entity proposed by

69. In practice, it is a mosaic, where approximately 35-45% are small and medium-sized entrepreneurs (real estate, services, tourism), approximately 15-25% are large farmers, 5–10% are large entrepreneurs (factories, quarries), while 20–30% are low-income workers in construction/contracting (data from Human Rights Watch).

70. Mathew Vickery, "Employing the Enemy: The Story of Palestinian Labourers on Israeli Settlements", Zed Books, 2017.




***Fayyad served as Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority from 2007 to 2013. He had previously worked for the IMF and the World Bank. At the Palestine Investment Conference he organized in Bethlehem on May 22, 2008, Fayyad invited investors by declaring: "We are throwing a party and the whole world is invited." The "party", however—actively supported by the Middle East Quartet (United States, European Union, Russia, UN) and Tony Blair—was accompanied by a "party" of repression: 2,000 PA security personnel were deployed, dozens of citizens were preemptively arrested, and demonstrations were banned so as not to spoil the conference's image. At the same time, Israel and international donors facilitated the entry of foreign businesspeople, while Palestinians themselves remained subject to the strict movement controls of Israeli apartheid.***

Oslo—even under Israeli supervision—could accommodate its businesses and its profits.[71] This proved true only to a limited extent, since exports and monetary policy remained under Israeli control and the Palestinian economy remained dependent on imports. Israel rejected both the one-state and two-state solutions as less advantageous, opting instead for a middle ground (non-)resolution of the issue. Gradually, a regime of neoliberal, fluid apartheid took shape, consolidating itself fully with the outbreak of the Second Intifada—a process that required the intensified cooperation of the Palestinian bourgeoisie.

The principles shaping the formation of the Palestinian semi-state were grounded in a neoliberal architecture. At the moment of neoliberal transition, a common terrain emerges in which the two bourgeois classes—Israeli and Palestinian—begin to speak a common language and converge on the terms under which the Palestinian working class is to be exploited. Under these conditions, the Palestinian proletariat is subjected, as already noted, to multiple and overlapping regimes of exploitation and domination.

The assault on the Palestinian working class is a structural feature of the capitalist Palestinian semi-state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This semi-state functions as an experimental laboratory for the application of harsh neoliberal policies and prescriptions of the World Bank and the IMF. From the outset, it was designed for technocratic governance, prioritizing stability, the attraction of investment, and the control of so-called "problem populations".[72] From 1994 to the present, the Palestinian Authority has operated as an instrument of capitalist restructuring under occupation: a form of state without sovereignty that implements austerity, institutionalizes labor subcontracting, reframes unemployment as an "opportunity for growth", and enforces social control in the name of "security and stability". Since 2007, under the premiership of Salam

71. Some of them even fantasized that the Oslo "peace dividends" would transform the West Bank and Gaza into the Singapore of the Middle East.

72. Between 1993 and 1996, the World Bank published its first development plans for Palestine, "Developing the Occupied Territories: An Investment in Peace" (1993) and the series "An Economic Framework for the West Bank and Gaza" (1994-95). These texts envisage an economy with a limited public sector, with an emphasis on privatisation and attracting foreign investment.

Fayyad, the West Bank and Gaza have arguably become a unique case in world history—a non-state formation implementing a full IMF program even in the absence of sovereignty.[73]

The Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, a memorandum imposed on the Palestinian proletariat in 2007, included austerity measures all too familiar to the Greek working class: wage freezes and cuts; mass layoffs of public-sector workers in health, education, and other administrative services; and the abolition or reduction of subsidies for basic goods such as water and electricity. Although cuts were officially announced in the security apparatus of the Palestinian Authority—employing over 40,000 people, with some estimates reaching 80,000—in practice dismissals were concentrated in health and education, as the repression of the Palestinian population remained a central item of "public expenditure". This neoliberal framework opened up new opportunities for the local elite while deepening uneven development and class stratification across the West Bank and Gaza. At the same time, the memoranda signed by the Palestinian Authority drove public debt to unsustainable levels, which—as our own bitter experience has shown—will ultimately be shifted onto the backs of the Palestinian proletariat.[74]

Even before October 7, unemployment in Gaza and the West Bank was hovering around 55%, forcing large segments of the population to survive on welfare, while wages remained extremely low. Informal employment is widespread, accounting for more than half of total employment. Unlike Gaza—where, prior to the war, roughly half of the workforce was employed in the public sector—in the West Bank around two-thirds of workers were employed in the private sector, about 15% in the public sector, and the remainder inside Israel, crossing the Green Line. In the private sector, employment is concentrated mainly in construction, agriculture, hotels and restaurants, as well as manufacturing; approximately 1,000 factories operate across 20 (settled) industrial zones in the West Bank. These figures indicate that the West Bank still offers the possibility for the large-scale exploitation of Palestinian labor power, whereas in Gaza this possibility was already far more constrained.

Palestinian workers from the West Bank, facing increasingly restricted access to the Israeli labor market, have become ever more dependent on employment provided by the Palestinian Authority (including positions in the security forces), informal economic activities, and work in settlements and in Israel proper without an Israeli "pass" (the work permit issued by Israel to Palestinians employed beyond the Green Line). The State of Israel has constructed a series of walls and fences around Jerusalem and other Palestinian communities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Biopolitical control exercised through the management of work permits—and more broadly through the entire permit regime governing access to healthcare, education, etc.—by the Israeli state in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, seeks to deploy access to employment as a preventive counter-insurgency mechanism, serving both the consolidation of settlement policy and everyday policing. A racist discourse around "Palestinian, Arab, Muslim terrorism" has prepared the ground for the operation of a network of coordinated security forces—bringing

73. The financial "aid" from the US to the Palestinian Authority began immediately after the Oslo Accords in exchange for the implementation of a capitalist development program unfolding through a series of memoranda and fiscal policies starting in 2008 and continuing until 2020 with various nomenclature such as Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, Palestinian National Development Plan, Palestinian Recovery and Development Plan, Public Financial Management Improvement Project for West Bank and Gaza.

74. For example, in 2013, the PA signed memoranda for long-term loans amounting to approximately $4.2 billion, or 50% of GDP, with annual interest payments of $200 million, apparently mortgaging workers' income on a permanent basis.

together Israel, the United States, the European Union, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority—which polices the Palestinian population in the West Bank.

## *The Security Forces Coordination in the West Bank*

Cooperation around the implementation of the security doctrine—aimed at counterinsurgency surveillance and repression in the Palestinian territories—has reached another level. When, in 2018, Tom Porteous, deputy programme director at *Human Rights Watch*, made the following statement, his assessment proved uncannily accurate. It has been borne out even recently by the Palestinian Authority's violent management of solidarity demonstrations for Gaza, involving tear gas, live ammunition, and the arrest of protesters. *"Twenty-five years after Oslo, Palestinian authorities have gained only limited power in the West Bank and Gaza, but yet, where they have autonomy, they have developed* ***parallel police states****. Calls by Palestinian officials to safeguard Palestinian rights ring hollow as they* [themselves] *crush dissent."*[75]

In the immediate aftermath of the Second Intifada (2005), American military and police experts arrived in Palestine as part of the funding attached to the first of the Structural Adjustment Programs signed by the Abbas–Fayyad Palestinian Authority. Their task was to train Palestinian security forces in Jordanian camps and to coordinate their cooperation with the Israeli army—a collaboration that has continued ever since, with varying degrees of tension—for the enforcement of public order and "safety" within the enclaves. The coordination of Israeli–Palestinian security forces has been openly *praised* by both U.S. and Israeli officials. As senior Israeli officers put it: *"This is the only aspect of the peace process that works well. There is nothing else. It should be encouraged"*.

***Clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and Palestinian security forces in Nablus, West Bank, 2022.***

75. "Palestine: Authorities Crush Dissent", Human Rights Watch, 23/10/2018. The entire article contains exceptionally interesting information about the repressive management of Palestinian proletarians, and especially journalists, by Hamas and the PA.

The police–repressive network, which was first deployed to suppress the internal opposition of Hamas, has since been turned against the Palestinian working class. It is financed by a large part of the state budget, while also absorbing international funds channelled through NGOs that recruit and train eligible—based on clientelist ties to the Palestinian Authority—impoverished Palestinian youth to police, and snitch on the rest of the proletariat. These security forces constitute the largest share of public-sector employment. On the one hand, they carry out the dirty work on Israel's behalf: dismantling armed organizations and carrying out police operations inside refugee camps across the West Bank. On the other, they repress resistance to austerity policies. A typical example occurred in early 2016, when the Palestinian Authority deployed security forces against striking Palestinian teachers during a prolonged strike. Police set up checkpoints near West Bank cities to prevent educators from attending demonstrations in Ramallah, while plain-clothes cops searched taxis, confiscated identity cards, and detained and interrogated dozens.

The... "efficiency" of security forces coordination extends beyond joint operations in Area A of the West Bank—formally under full Palestinian Authority jurisdiction—to intelligence sharing and the alternating arrest, interrogation, and torture of the same "dissident" Palestinians by Israeli and Palestinian security services. This role—as a reliable attack dog of law and order—must be performed with maximum effectiveness in order to safeguard the operational interests of Palestinian capital and render the West Bank attractive to foreign investment. At the same time, the Palestinian Authority supports security coordination to demonstrate to Israel and the United States that it is "both willing and able" to prevent "violence" and "chaos" in the public sphere.

This security network—facilitated by the United States and the European Union, supported by Jordan and Egypt, and operationalized through coordinated deployments of the Israeli army and Palestinian Authority security forces—is considered one of the most sophisticated and complex responses to the problem of confining, disciplining, and surveilling "surplus" marginalized populations in the world.

### *The (joint or not) activities of the Palestinian and Israeli bourgeoisie against the proletariat*

The Palestinian bourgeoisie, though relatively subordinate—but also "protected" in certain respects, since full independence from the Israeli economy would expose it to competition from neighboring capitals exploiting cheaper labor[76]—does not play a simple passive role as a manager of Palestinian labor power within the two self-governing entities.

In the areas it has controlled since 2006–07, the Palestinian Authority maintains its own ministries and police forces, while also regulating—in **collaboration** with Israeli permit brokers who siphon off up to one third of workers' wages—the *entry and exit permits* of Palestinian workers into Israel proper. At the same time, Palestinian capitalists in general (even if some of them also finance and support the "resistance") benefit even from the settlement regime itself through their development businesses and live in luxury within the very same West Bank enclaves as the proletariat that begins its working day at four in the morning, passes through the exhausting and often humiliating Israeli checkpoint controls, and returns around nine at night—only to face its

76. The "protection" of the Palestinian bourgeoisie is certainly not a goal of Israeli capital; it is a side effect of dependence. Israeli capital is interested in keeping it weak enough not to be competitive, but also functional enough to maintain it as a pillar of economic cooperation and control.

Palestinian wardens, the security forces of the Palestinian Authority, who, on behalf of the Israeli state, police it and make sure it remains in line until the following day.

Palestinian capitalists benefit from the settlement regime in multiple ways—primarily indirectly, through the restructuring of the Palestinian market; through the exploitation of distortions in the development business; and as intermediaries capable of operating both within and beyond the Israeli regulatory framework. More concretely, opportunities for joint business emerge in several key sectors: a) *Real estate* and *commercial land*. Settlements exert pressure toward the urbanization of Palestinian areas, particularly in Areas A and B, where the population is concentrated. The surge in housing demand, rising land prices, and the prospect of gentrification in selected areas generate profitability in construction and real estate. Special projects such as Rawabi—run by the company of Palestinian capitalist Bashar Masri—are built with strategic Israeli support and funding from international institutions, capitalizing on the isolation and fragmentation of Palestinian land. b) *Construction* and *subcontracting*. Palestinian contractors take on subcontracted infrastructure projects within or adjacent to settlements (roads, fences, networks). Others supply materials, labor, or technical services to Israeli construction firms operating in Area C. In this way, they become active managers of territorial dispossession and of the proletarianization of the poorest Palestinians. c) *Trade* and *supply chains*. Restrictions on circulation and the asymmetric accessibility between Areas A, B, and C create demand for local intermediaries able to negotiate simultaneously with Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority. Some operate logistics companies, hold privileged licenses, and secure monopolistic positions in the supply of basic necessities such as cement or flour. d) *Financial sector*. International aid—channeled through the PA or NGOs—is distributed to local players, with the most powerful reaping investment capital. The economy surrounding settlements (and their barriers) also generates investment opportunities in services that have to do with permit management, access coordination, transportation, logistics and related brokerage. e) *Security* and *surveillance*. Certain Palestinian entrepreneurs and technicians collaborate with the Palestinian Authority or NGOs on security, surveillance, and technical infrastructure projects, with Israel's explicit or tacit consent. These ventures offer employment (for social decompression), giving surveillance a "human face", without ever threatening the underlying architecture of apartheid.

The Palestinian bourgeoisie, drawing on its ties to international donors, has established a dense NGO sector that employs a significant share of the workforce under the precarious conditions and wage-benefit regimes (typical of NGO businesses in our own setting as well). At the same time, having become a favored crony of political officials and dignitary cops of the Palestinian Authority, it utilizes the plentiful donor funds in collaboration with Palestinian capitalists of the diaspora to control large public and private sector monopolies. These monopolies, protected by the Palestinian Authority, cover more than twenty-five basic imported commodities, including flour, sugar, fuel, frozen meat, cigarettes, live animals, cement, aggregates, steel, wood, and tobacco. These monopolies were selectively granted to Palestinian political-economic elites who maintained *especially close ties* with Israeli firms. Former Israeli political and military officials, following their retirement, entered into *business partnerships* with Palestinian capitalists and senior figures of the Palestinian Authority. In return, Israel extended a set of *special privileges* to Palestinian businessmen and politicians: *access to reconstruction and development licenses, expanded freedom of movement and trade, and VIP-pass status* for travel across the Green Line.

At the opposite pole, an entire *apparatus of control* is deployed against the Palestinian working class, to restrict its mobility and pre-emptively suppress it: the apartheid wall (2002), which—tracing convoluted curves to accommodate Israeli settlements in the West Bank—cuts deep into Palestinian territory, producing enclaves of villages and towns severed from their surroundings or compressed into narrow zones adjacent to the wall; the walled bypass roads that further fragment Palestinian land and transform everyday working-class movement into an exhausting ordeal; the military checkpoints, whose number has reached a new peak since 7 October; the satellites, drones, and video-monitoring systems equipped with facial recognition, integrated with a dense network of Palestinian informants and coordinated with the security forces of the Palestinian Authority; and a system of work permits for employment in Israel and in the settlements, which functions as a flexible valve, opening and closing not only in line with the conjunctural needs of Israeli capital, but above all according to the level of biopolitical discipline deemed necessary at any given moment.

At the same time that workers face restrictions and control even for basic tasks—digging a well, repairing a collapsed wall, digging drainage ditches, or simply filling a hole in the road require permits that are often not granted—Palestinian capitalists are *investing in industrial zones within the West Bank*. In these zones, where neither Palestinian nor Israeli labor law applies, trade unions are banned, and wages fall below the statutory minimum, they exploit, often *in collaboration with Israel*, the cheap labor drawn from the Palestinian ghetto-reserve.[77]

The joint activities of Palestinian and Jewish capitalists extend beyond the bantustanization of Palestinian territories, encompassing a diverse range of activities: Israeli-Palestinian business forums, Palestinian investments in Israel—including in its settlements—and the joint management of water resources.

Among the joint development projects, the planned Palestinian city of Rawabi stands out.[78] Located northwest of Ramallah and designed for 40,000 residents from the Palestinian middle and upper classes, it replicates the settler-colonial pattern: a de facto gated community—given the fragmentation of the West Bank with private walled roads and constant checkpoints—built on a hill with uniform luxury buildings, residential zones, commercial areas, and hi-tech production facilities.

**The Israeli-Palestinian partnership knows no limit:**

* Palestinian capital is invested in Israel and its illegal settlements at far higher rates than in the West Bank—between $2.5 and $5.8 billion, compared to just $1.5 billion.

* Palestinian companies engage in product laundering in the Jordan Valley, rebranding settlers' agricultural goods as "Palestinian products" before exporting them to international markets, thereby circumventing the effects of the BDS campaign.

77. Jordan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China, and in recent years France and Germany are also bringing their investments to these "enclaves within enclaves".

78. Contracts have been signed with more than 10 Israeli construction companies as suppliers, while Israel provides the necessary permits for land use, passage through the Israeli fortified road network, and water supply to the city, a commendable example of cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli capital.

* Palestinian entrepreneurs collaborate with Israeli high-tech firms.[79]

* Palestinian companies—such as the Ramallah Mövenpick Hotel, Bank of Jordan, Jordan Ahli Bank, Cairo Amman Bank, and Pal-Safe—are clients of Netacs Ltd, an Israeli security services company.[80]

For much of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu, which today supports the "good Palestinian nationalism" against the "Zionist Nazis", much of what we have said above about the Palestinian semi-state in the West Bank is already more or less familiar, since the Palestinian Authority has long been regarded as a "bad" and "treacherous" national authority. The current "heroic" "Palestinian resistance," hegemonized by Hamas and backed by various jihadist organizations as well as the remnants of left-wing nationalism (PFLP, DFLP), is, according to Greek apologists of Palestinian nationalism, supposed to express the most radical tendencies among Palestinians—above all among young proletarians. The very same youth whom it has for years suppressed, arrested, tortured, imprisoned, flogged, and occasionally murdered, we might add. Unfortunately, the critique (that had a long tradition in Greece) which refused the unity of "the people" and the "nation" in the less developed regions of the capitalist world and rejected any identification of the population with the state, is now in full retreat. The fact that a large section of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian movement now openly backs collaboration between those confined in what is often described as the world's largest open-air prison with their wardens and exploiters, rallying behind the slogan "Free Palestine," while abandoning a long revolutionary tradition opposed to

***The Rawabi project, north of Jerusalem and Ramallah: a cheerful, glossy Palestinian-style capitalist playground in the midst of horror.***

79. The case of the Ramallah-based company SADARA is just one example. Israel's Cisco Systems is another example of a company involved in transforming the Palestinian economy along the lines of Israel's "successful" "Startup Nation" model, providing Palestinian entrepreneurs with the services of Israeli experts.

80. It belongs to retired Major General Danny Rothschild, who commanded Israeli military forces in the West Bank and southern Lebanon and worked in military intelligence.

all nationalisms, surpasses even the bleakest expectations of those who have not donned the neo–Third Worldist lenses of *campism*. It takes a heavy dose of ideology not to recognize that such positions are entirely alien—if not outright hostile—to any perspective of genuine social emancipation. The example of Gaza lays bare just how fragile the foundations of the realpolitik so casually invoked by so many around us are.

# 4.

# Gaza: Flashpoint of Capitalist Contradictions in the Middle East

## *The restructuring of relations of production in Gaza following the Second Intifada*

The end of the Second Intifada in 2005 marks a new era for the Gaza Strip. The now infamous fence enclosing the 360 square kilometers that make up the Strip was built that year, the Jewish settlements were evacuated from within, and similarly Israeli security forces withdrew. These were the conditions for a huge ethnic prison to be formed. Hamas, revising its previous stance, participated in the 2006 parliamentary elections and won an outright majority with 44.45% of the vote—a result that was not entirely expected. By taking the position of political administration of the semi-independent Palestinian state, Hamas effectively recognized the de facto existence of the Israeli state and its borders, essentially claiming a two-state solution, even though it continued to formally not recognize the legitimacy of the state of Israel based on the organization's charter of 1988. Meanwhile, Abbas of the PLO remained president of the Palestinian Authority, having inherited the position from the late Arafat in 2005. This situation of dual sovereignty and internal strife has allowed Israel and the US to exert pressure through President Abbas to marginalize and delegitimize Hamas. The latter, refusing to disarm its brigades, jeopardized all the institutional reforms[81] in the palestinian security forces that Abbas had agreed upon with the US, the UN, Russia, and the EU at the end of the Second Intifada, in their effort to rebuild a Palestinian police (semi-)state. That same year, to ensure that the agreed reforms would proceed smoothly, the US created the office of the United States security assistance to the Palestinian National Authority (USSC).[82]

The emphasis here should be placed on the timing: the end of the (largely militarized) uprising that had called into question the Oslo Accords and had destabilized the region for five years. These specific reforms to the security sector in Palestine, as well as the creation of the USSC itself, were part of a "roadmap"[83] that had already been proposed in 2003 to the Palestinian Authority

81. Andy Clarno, "Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa After 1994", The University of Chicago Press, 2017, p. 168.

82. USSC played a crucial role after Hamas won the election since it undertook the task of providing security assistance (i.e., military training, equipment and financial support) only to the part of PA's security forces that stayed faithful to Abbas.

83. This is the document entitled "A Performance-based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", which was prepared by the so-called Middle East Quartet formed by the US, the UN, the EU, and Russia, and presented on April 30, 2003. The title of this document already contains the empty promise

by the US and others in order to put a stop to the Intifada. The Intifada can also be considered as the main cause for the Israeli state's political decision to withdraw its army and all 6,500 settlers from the Strip. The economic cost of maintaining both in such a historically unstable region was prohibitive. Instead, the Israeli state chose to abandon Gaza, isolate it, and cut it off even more from the West Bank, making any possible path to a "two-state solution" even more difficult.

***The wall around Gaza***

The Palestinian proletariat was getting *partially redundant* for Israeli capital already after the First Intifada. Due to its unruliness, Israel began to secure labor elsewhere (e.g., immigrants from Eastern Europe, Ethiopia, and Southeast Asia), and so after the new insurrectional wave of the Second Intifada, it chose—because it was already in a position to do so—to marginalize it even more. Especially in the case of Gaza, the Israeli state rendered the *proletariat majoritarily as a surplus population* living under the most extreme urban security conditions, permanently sealing its "rightful" place in the Israeli economy: that of an absolute pariah.

In May 2007, 500 soldiers of the Palestinian National Security Forces (NSF), trained by the USSC and equipped with new weaponry, were deployed to northern Gaza. Correctly interpreting this move as an attempted coup, Hamas launched a military offensive in an attempt to maintain Gaza as its stronghold, since its power in the West Bank had already received multiple blows by Fatah and Israel.[84] Through bloody battles against Fatah and the NSF soldiers, Hamas finally managed to secure its power in Gaza, unlike in the West Bank. President Abbas declared a state of emergency on June 14, 2007, and overthrew the government in which Hamas held a majority of parliamentary seats.

Under economic and military pressure from the US and Israel on Hamas between 2006 and 2007, pressure that took the form of collective punishment[85] of the inhabitants of Gaza, 90% of factories in the area closed, commercial activities outside the fence were minimized, and profits

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of a Palestinian state. It is worth noting that the grandiloquent statements we hear to this day from leaders of various countries are nothing new. In reality, they are more a matter of diplomatic rhetoric and attempts to convey a certain image to the domestic audiences as well.

84. For example, in June 2006, in retaliation for a relatively small-scale attack inside Israeli borders, for which Hamas and other organizations claimed responsibility and which resulted in the deaths of two IDF soldiers, Israel arrested a bunch of Hamas leaders in the West Bank, including 20 members of parliament and 8 ministers.

85. The pressure involved the military blockade of almost all of Hamas's road links with Israel and the economic blockade of the PA. In the same pattern of collective punishment, harsh and bloody military interventions involving mass killings by the Israeli army in Gaza took place in 2009, 2012, 2014, 2018, and 2021 in response to military attacks by Hamas (e.g., hostage-taking, rocket fire, assassinations).

in the agricultural sector plummeted. Unemployment hit record levels and living standards reached the point where 80% of the population was living below the poverty line. Soon, Hamas managed to establish an alternative economy based on newly constructed tunnel networks that served as the basic infrastructure for trade, mainly with Egypt.[86] Various types of goods were being transported at very low prices: from fuel and raw materials to vehicles and animals. Eighty percent of trade between 2009 and 2012 in Gaza was based on the tunnels. A new class of merchants and entrepreneurs emerged under the umbrella of Hamas around the tunnel economy. Government coffers fell by taxes collected from this new commercial network. Various construction, housing, and other business projects were launched, and the government itself took on the role of investor in the agricultural sector, aquaculture, etc.

However, since 2012, the economic recovery has begun to reverse due to ongoing military sabotage operations by Israel (bombings, planned flooding of farms, etc.). The economy of Gaza was hit even harder by the gradual restriction of trade with Egypt in 2013, when the Muslim Brotherhood government was overthrown and the new el-Sisi regime hardened Egypt's stance towards Hamas. With the most significant shortages being in fuel, more than 60% of industrial enterprises closed or were operating at reduced capacity.[87] In 2016, there were 216,000 unemployed, that is, 42% of the total workforce in Gaza.

The Gaza economy slipped into an economic downturn in 2017 as per capita GDP and total investments started to decline.[88] That year, Palestinian Authority government spending to the Gaza Strip decreased and wage cuts to the employees of the public sector caused further instability (e.g., inability to pay back personal loans). A subsequent blow was the suspension of US

86. Ahmed Tannira, "The Political Economy of the Gaza Strip Under Hamas", from the collective work "Political Economy of Palestine", Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

87. Sarah Roy, "The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development", ch. "Introduction", Institute for Palestine Studies, 2016.

88. Ibid.

funding of UNRWA from 2018 to 2021. In 2023, the standard of living in Gaza reached only a quarter of that in the West Bank. Roughly two-thirds of workers were employed in informal jobs.[89]

## *The historical role of Hamas in the Israel-Palestine capitalist formation*

Based on the above, it is reasonable to speak, as Minassian does, of a surplus proletariat in Gaza, in the sense that a huge mass of labor cannot be productively employed by capital. Questions that arise at this point are: why is there an *oversized* surplus proletariat in Gaza in particular? Why such insistence on sabotaging the political regime there? Can Hamas ultimately be considered a "subcontractor" of Israel in the region, as Minassian argues? Can Gaza, like the West Bank, be considered part of the Israeli state and part of the Israeli economy, as he also argues? Is the current situation in Gaza a moment of negotiation between Hamas and Israel?

Here, we need to focus on the role of Hamas in the Palestinian movements in the contemporary history of Palestine-Israel and the historical character of Gaza as the cradle of Palestinian nationalism. In relation to this second point, a few initial observations are illuminating regarding Hamas' role in the question of Palestine. After the Nakba (1948), Gaza became the epicenter of the Palestinian refugee crisis. Nearly 200,000 refugees from southern Palestine were trapped in the narrow coastal enclave that we call Gaza Strip under Egyptian administration—or, in today's popular anti-colonial terms, under "occupation"—without recognition of statehood, in a situation of political uncertainty within which both secular-radical and religious currents of politicization developed.[90] The refugee camps were organised by UNRWA, but it was the Egyptian regime that ruled authoritatively over the Palestinian proletariat, persecuting "subversive" and "communist" elements. In the 1950s, the first armed Gaza-based Palestinian networks appeared, including the forerunners of Fatah. The area became a recruiting ground for national liberation groups, as the prolonged precariousness of the regime, overpopulation pressure, and the offensive against the needs of the proletariat, combined with the fact that leftists were systematically persecuted, created the conditions for the emergence of an early national liberation guerrilla movement.

After the Six-Day War in 1967 and the de facto annexation of the Gaza Strip to Israel, among other things, a coordinated strategy of **islamization** of social life began. With the help of both Israeli services (e.g., tolerance or even indirect support for the Muslim Brotherhood) and local bourgeois strata, an attempt was made to establish a theocratic moral framework that delegitimized secular, socialist, and revolutionary political organizations. The fact that the number of mosques in the region increased from about 200 in 1967 to 800 in 1987 is indicative of the extent of this strategy. Thus, islamization was already being used in the 1960s as a form of class discipline, directed against the secularisation and radical politicisation of the Palestinian proletariat, while Gaza was gradually transformed into a **laboratory for the Palestinian civil war**. The emergence of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood as a "cultural" movement aimed at constructing the "Islamic personality", with an emphasis on moral purity and abstention from both class struggle and armed confrontation with the Israeli state, placed the Islamist movement **in competition** with the secular nationalism of the PLO. Things partially changed with the First Intifada. As Graham Usher[91] puts it:

89. Alessandro Mantovani, "Il 'proletariato' palestinese un po' di cifre", bresciaanticapitalista.com, 2024.

90. Sarah Roy, Ibid.

91. Graham Usher "What kind of nation? The rise of Hamas in the occupied territories. Race & Class", Institute of Race Relations (1995)

> '"When the Intifada erupted, the Muslim Brotherhood was posed with a dilemma: either forego its de facto accommodation with the occupation or lose the Palestinian street, where legitimacy was born less of piety than national resistance. After initial hesitation, it resolved the contradiction through the formation of Hamas, an Islamist movement whose goal was national liberation."

During the Intifada, the cultural agenda of the Muslim Brotherhood was sustained by Hamas by adopting tactics of raging attacks against "un-Islamic" behaviors, as with the enforcement of the headscarf on women in Gaza or raids targeting shops selling liquor, but this newly born organization additionally incorporated a religious rhetoric to promote national struggle as divinely approved.


***Women protest in Gaza City against a decision by the Sharia Judicial Council banning unmarried women from traveling within and outside the Gaza Strip without the permission of their "guardian," usually their father or another older male relative, 2021***

The groundwork for Hamas' emergence on the political scene was laid by Fatah's defeat in Lebanon in 1982 and its retreat to Tunisia. Since then, Fatah has prioritized a strategy of negotiations with Israel, adopting a less intransigent policy than in the past. In 1987, the First Intifada broke out, the "Stone Uprising", so named because it was not a military operation, but started as a spontaneous struggle from below. It was in this environment that Hamas was born, promoting itself as the truly uncompromising force of the "Palestinian resistance". In fact, during the uprising, in an attempt to cement ties with the proletarian movement, it even went so far as to incite some strikes. Its main role, like that of the PLO, was, of course, to nationalize and militarize the uprising. Hamas set the end of the Israeli occupation as a non-negotiable demand and the central axis of its political agenda. During the uprising, when Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder and leader of the organization, was arrested, Hamas found refuge in Jordan, thanks in large part to its connections with the Muslim Brotherhood there. The organization's administrative center abroad took on a central, even primary, role.[92] It established economic ties with other Arab countries and even set up branches and military training centers in countries such as Lebanon, Sudan, and Iran. With the Gulf War, due to Arafat's pro-Iraqi stance, the financial flows from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia[93] that had until then been directed towards Fatah were redirected towards Hamas. This territorial structure and geographical distribution of the organization deepened the division between the military wing and the political center, a trend that continues to this day and which Minassian also

92. A useful commentary on the role of Hamas's external administrative center is provided by the text of the Rotta Comunista group, "Cosa Attendersi Da Hamas", from which we also drew information.

93. Saudi Arabia was Hamas' main financier until 2004, when the US intervened to deter it, leading to a minimization of related donations. Since then, with Hamas' rise to power in Gaza, Iran, Syria, and gradually Qatar have taken over the provision of the political support needed by the newly established regime.

comments on in his attempt to provide an interpretative framework for October 7, recognizing the relative autonomy of the military wing of the organization.

Although Hamas was created some months after the First Intifada broke out, Fatah and the PLO as a whole emerged as the big winners since they gradually managed to ride the wave of the uprising. They controlled, assimilated, militarized, and nationalized the social struggle. This situation allowed the PLO to sit down at the negotiating table with Israel for the first time and sign the Oslo Accords in 1993-95, which led to the creation of the Palestinian Authority, with the PLO at the helm. Hamas rejected the compromise of these peace processes; it insisted on its rhetorical opposition to Israel's legitimacy as a state and its doctrine of ending the occupation. While the PLO withdrew from the armed struggle against Israel, Hamas continued its attacks. The US declared Hamas a terrorist organization and its leadership was exiled from Jordan when the regime there changed in 1999, and settled in Damascus, Syria.[94] Israel had deliberately delayed declaring Hamas "illegal" until the fall of 1989, a year after the banning of the (largely PLO-affiliated) popular committees—a fact that demonstrates the de facto tolerance that the Islamist camp had enjoyed until then.

***Hamas takes power in Gaza in 2007. Members of the al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, hold a parade in Rafah.***

During the Second Intifada, Hamas was able to emerge as the main representative of the "resistance", clearly taking over from Fatah after Arafat's death in 2004. So, by 2005, with the end of the uprising, Hamas presented Israel's withdrawal from Gaza as its own personal victory. On the Israeli side, the withdrawal of the army and settlers was indeed perceived by the Jewish Israeli community as a defeat, and the evacuation of the respective settlements took place amid armed "protests".

94. In 2011, with the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the ensuing crisis of the regime in Syria, the Hamas leadership moved to Qatar and a period of generous funding of the organization by Doha began.

The PLO essentially represented secular nationalism and, by adopting the pragmatic logic of its participation in the Oslo "peace processes", sought to create an autonomous Arab semi-state that would secure relations with the West, as well as with other Arab states. This was a realistic prospect, given that the movement of socialist pan-Arabism—of which Fatah was once a part—had long since been defeated. With the rise of the mullahs to power in Iran in 1980, if not earlier, Islamism emerged as the new dominant "anti-imperialist" political force in the Middle East; a religious fundamentalism that served as an ideological cover for nationalism, which, similar to religious Zionism, advocated a return to a (revised) local tradition and provided a new communal framework around the clergy which came to be very attractive, particularly to the newly dispossessed proletarianized masses at this period. Representing the Islamist spirit of "resistance", Hamas essentially claimed a different fate for the Palestinians by promoting a model of capital accumulation intertwined with funds from the Islamic world, something it partially achieved. Reasonably, this could not be consistent with Israel's strategy, which, especially for the West Bank, had completely different plans, partly due to the existence of vast settlement areas, so Hamas had to be overthrown from there at least. It is on this basis that Israel's aggression against the regime in Gaza over the last twenty years and the condemnation of the majority of the population there to a surplus proletariat can be explained *to a certain extent*.

If we have outlined above Hamas' long-term and ambitious goals, in which it ultimately trapped itself, since the time it took political control of the Strip, its main concern was to simply pass itself off as the ultimate force that can protect the enclave against the "Israeli enemy". In other words, it derived its internal political legitimacy from playing the role of national liberator without there being any real national liberation movement at all—as Minasian comments—and at the same time its military offensives against Israel served as a bargaining chip, depending also on the political needs of its "anti-Israel" sponsors at any given time.

Israel found itself playing a contradictory role in Gaza: *both* restricting *and* maintaining the Hamas regime, even strengthening it on occasion. Since Israel sees the population of Gaza as nothing more than a burden, all it needs is someone to act as a prison guard in the huge prison it has built for the "surplus" proletariat. At the same time, however, the subcontractor must know his place and not get carried away. Israel worked hard to prevent the emergence of an independent economy within Gaza, insisting on the doctrine of deterrence of any plan to create an independent Palestinian state. This explains even better Israel's aggressive stance against the Hamas regime. It also reinforces Minassian's argument that when we talk about Israel-Palestine, we are dealing with a single state, something that Israel does not want to change. Israel preferred Gaza to be maintained through the controlled distribution of financial resources, either from taxes redistributed by Israel itself, or even better, through international donors. The less Israel was spending on maintaining the open-air prison of Gaza and the more legitimate the prison guard was to the population there, the better. Rather than permitting the establishment of an independent economy in Gaza, Israel preferred even to occasionally increase the flow of Palestinian workers from Gaza to Israel by providing more work permits and alleviating the discontent of the population, thus also ensuring a marginal but real integration of Gaza into the Israeli economy.

As already mentioned, Israel's policy has worked occasionally to the advantage of Hamas. The economic and political assistance that Israel has provided to the Islamic movement in the region as a counterweight to the secular nationalism of the PLO goes back many years, as we have shown. More specifically, from the 1970s to the 1980s, Israel provided institutional and financial support to the Islamic charity Mujama' al-Islami, which was linked to the Muslim Brotherhood

in Egypt and founded by Sheikh Yassin, the later (co-)founder of Hamas. This foundation established a vast network of mosques based in Gaza, as well as the Islamic University of Gaza, which together formed the basis for the development of the Islamist wing of the social movements in the years that followed. So, since the mid-1970s, Gaza has been the main hub for the growth of **religious fundamentalism** in Palestine.

The Israeli Brigadier General Yitzhak Segev stated in 1986: *"We provide financial support to Islamic groups through mosques and religious schools in order to create a force that will oppose the leftist forces that support the PLO"*. The book *Stateless in Gaza* (1986)[95] by Paul Cossali and Clive Robson includes the testimony of a Gaza resident and member of the Muslim Brotherhood, who speaks openly—from his own perspective, of course—about the Israelis' tactic of allowing the Islamist movement to develop:

> [The Islamist movement] didn't really grow in Gaza until the mid-seventies as people lost hope in the nationalist movement for which they had sacrificed so much and gained so little. It has grown despite hostility from the progressives and a clever tactic by the Israelis who have done their best to destroy us by letting us grow. They knew that doing this would sow the seeds of mistrust against us among the people and tarnish our good image.

Over the last two decades, Israel has continued to use the "divide and rule" strategy to further disunite the Palestinian administration, undermining the negotiating power of the other subcontractor, the Palestinian Authority, so that the Israeli state could benefit even more from the territorial, productive, and settler expansion in the West Bank. Thus, Israel chose, depending on the circumstances, to turn a blind eye to the financial support that Hamas received from "hostile" countries. With the economic stagnation of 2017 in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority cutting the salaries of civil servants there, Hamas focused even more to securing cash flows from Qatar. The Netanyahu government facilitated these financial transactions, a move that has been strongly criticized by Israel's liberal opposition on the grounds that it provided indirect support to Hamas. Indeed, this situation shows that Israel was targeting the Gaza regime only to a certain extent. In fact, it was the right wing of the Israeli capital in particular that considered Hamas useful in counterbalancing the power of the Palestinian Authority and adopted this strategy. Putting pressure on the Palestinian Authority was necessary, among other things, because Netanyahu's Likud party had made it an election promise to officially annex large areas of the West Bank to Israel from 2019 (see Jordan Valley). Thus, in 2019, at a Likud conference, he was in a position to claim that *"anyone who wants to thwart the establishment of a Palestinian state has to support bolstering Hamas and transferring money to Hamas … This is part of our strategy – to isolate the Palestinians in Gaza from the Palestinians in the West Bank"*.[96] Similarly, Israel's current far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, has made the following controversial statement: *"The Palestinian Authority is a burden, Hamas is an asset"*.[97] In short, as long as Hamas's overly ambitious aspirations were kept in check, the islamist organization could be allowed to "do its job". Being kept alive with extra money from abroad while maintaining a minimum level of survival for the surplus proletariat was not posing an issue.

95. Paul Cossali και Clive Robson, "Stateless in Gaza", Zed Press, 1986, p. 108

96. "Warning: Benjamin Netanyahu is walking right into Hamas's trap", The Guardian, 20/10/2023

97. "Fact-Checking What Benjamin Netanyahu Said in His 2024 Interview With TIME", Time Magazine, 13/8/2024

We can see, then, that Minassian is justified in viewing Hamas, like the Palestinian Authority, as a "subcontractor". Clearly, these two administrative entities do not work in the same way, but they essentially perform the same function: the police-military management of the surplus proletariat. In the case of the Palestinian Authority, this goal is achieved through integration, while in the case of Hamas, through exclusion.

### *The war in Gaza as a turning point in the management of the surplus proletariat*

These past two years, military violence has reached an extreme level. Suffice it to say that in the twenty years between 1986 and 2006, which includes the First and Second Intifadas, 5,050 Palestinians were killed, according to data from the Israeli humanitarian organization B' Tselem; less than one-tenth of the Palestinian losses in the current war.[98] Of course, from the early years of the intensely militarized Second Intifada and then with the fencing of Gaza and Hamas's takeover of power, the contradictions described above had led the Israeli state to adopt slaughterous military operations of a collective punishment nature, with Palestinian losses reaching hundreds or even thousands of lives each time. In this war, however, we have reached the point of relentless bombing of a population of around two million people and the use of starvation as a weapon of war, practices which, under international law, bear the basic characteristics of genocide. From an autonomous working-class perspective, the slaughter of the inhabitants of Gaza leaves its mark as one of the most deadly wounds to the physical and political existence of the proletariat in the 21st century. What we are facing is the extreme form that the management of the surplus Palestinian proletariat has taken in the military framework of mass and calculated extermination, and indeed with international support. Israel, Hamas, Arab states, the US, the EU, Iran, Hezbollah, and ultimately the whole international rabble of bosses are playing their negotiating cards on the graveyard of Gaza.

In this context, the current massacre marks a turning point in the development of bourgeois democracy in general, and not just in Israel: **the assimilation of a permanent "state of emergency" as the only possible escape route for a capitalist formation that is in constant conflict with its own heightened contradictions.** The exemplary military management of Gaza creates the grim possibility of such a future for all the "surplus" populations.

October 7 can be seen as a moment of explosion of the capitalist contradictions in the Middle East region; as a turning point for Hamas's own policy, too, driven by a multitude of factors: the ongoing strangulation of the Gaza economy by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the subsequent search for greater economic support from Middle Eastern countries over the last 20 years, the threat of Saudi Arabia's inclusion in the Abraham Accords,[99] and *primarily* due to the intensification of internal class conflicts in the Gaza Strip, which had to be suppressed and nationalized. October 7 and the current adoption of guerrilla warfare as a tactic of confrontation with Israel,

98. Again, between 1986 and 2006, Hamas killed 1,426 Israeli civilians and soldiers (Khaled Hroub, "Hamas - A Beginner's guide", The Guardian, 2006, p. 54), while on October 7, 2023, in just one day, the killings reached 1,200, which partly explains the initial "shock" and positive reception of the IDF's invasion of Gaza by Jewish Israelis—a sentiment that has been waning since for a significant portion of society.

99. This move required a relative normalization of relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, supposedly on the basis of easing pressure on the Palestinians. Saudi Arabia demanded that Israel adopt a more conciliatory stance towards the PA, which would serve to curb Hamas' power. The cooperation between the two states through the Abraham Accords would also act as a brake on the attempted strengthening of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a key ally of Hamas.

rightly according to Minasian, cannot be seen as part of a popular national liberation movement (let alone as a class struggle). On the one hand, because it is difficult to argue that there was a realistic goal of "national liberation" behind the initial attack and, on the other hand, because no corresponding mass armed or unarmed movement has emerged from the Palestinians in the West Bank and within Israel.

***Thousands of displaced Palestinians wait, following the signing of the ceasefire in January 2025, to be allowed to return to northern Gaza.***

As for the Israeli state, the attack on October 7 cannot be seen simply as a problem and a curse, especially from the perspective of its current dominant right-wing and far-right political faction. Being itself cornered within Jewish society, it seeks legitimacy on the basis of a proclaimed "state of emergency" and "national security" issues. Ultimately, it seeks a rearrangement of the balance of power in the Palestinian territories in particular, but also in the Middle East in general, always in the interests of Israeli capital and the US that backs it.

Now,[100] the Hamas regime is collapsing, as is the social fabric of Gaza. Industrial zones, farmland, and a whole bunch of buildings, houses, hospitals, etc. are nothing more than a pile of rubble, something that was largely planned by the IDF, even using bulldozers to methodically raze entire neighborhoods. The issue of disarming Hamas is back as one of Israel's key demands. Israel has been proclaiming the withdrawal of Hamas's administrative and military apparatus since the very beginning of the war. Based on Israel's declarations, the permanent restoration of its military and police presence in the region appears to be one of the most likely scenarios. The far-right and fundamentalist factions of the Israeli government are even eyeing and promoting the ethnic cleansing of the enclave through a flimsy program of "voluntary emigration" for the Palestinian population, with the blessing of the US. Now, in the absence of an administrative mechanism in Gaza, the traditional factions and large armed gangs supported by Israel are taking on a dominant role in the region.

100. We should remind the fellow reader that the original text was written in Greek in September 2025, before the October cease-fire.

On the part of the Arab countries, support for Gaza is limited to drafting counterproposals to the Trump's plan for its reconstruction, seeking avenues for negotiation to bring peace to the region, and preventing the migration of Palestinian migrants who wish to cross their borders[101]—something that the PFLP, for example, and other "pro-Palestinian" groups around the world support as an act of solidarity (!) with the "resistance".

***August 17, 2025: On the same day that the United Nations announces, following an independent investigation by 100 humanitarian organizations, that genocide is being committed in Gaza, thousands of Palestinians are being forcibly displaced for a second time from their homes—or what remains of them—in Gaza City, heading toward a so-called "humanitarian protection zone" in Rafah. Behind them, Gaza is burning. As the Israeli army advances neighborhood by neighborhood, blowing up and leveling buildings, we are left wondering where the "heroic fighters" of Hamas are, with their bravado and grandiose threats. Those who treated the proletarians—people who have nothing but their precarious existence—as pawns in their dirty power games, sacrificing them for their cheap political expediency. Meanwhile, civilians who are unable to leave the city and are killed by IDF forces are simply labeled by the Israeli government as Hamas terrorists.***

101. Approximately 100,000 Palestinians crossed the border into Egypt "illegally" in the summer of 2024 (see, "Life has come to a standstill': the Palestinian refugees struggling to survive in Egypt", The Guardian, 24/6/2024), with the per capita fee ranging from 5 to 10 thousand dollars (se, "Palestinians desperate to flee Gaza pay thousands in bribes to 'brokers'", The Guardian, 8/1/2024). Since then, border security has been tightened considerably, completely preventing movement outside Gaza.

*Public appearances of Hamas fighters immediately after the January 2025 ceasefire, in a display of force.*

*Israeli warplanes bomb a residential building in Gaza in 2021.*


*Israeli military sign at checkpoints during the return of displaced Palestinians after the January 2025 ceasefire agreement, in Gaza City in the north, reading: "Slow down! Checkpoint ahead." Laptops, mobile phones, cameras, and pickup trucks are treated in the same way as weapons and are prohibited.*

# 5.

# Israel 2023: The "Political Crisis" as a Crisis of Class Relations

The explosion of war in Gaza was the most violent expression of the crisis of class relations that was smoldering within the Israeli social formation. Within Israel, the internal divisions, the erosion of social consensus and the exacerbation of class conflict for a lengthy period before October 7th reveal the fragile balance on which the neoliberal apartheid stands. The explosion of war in Gaza and the social turmoil in Israel itself are different facets of the same crisis. The external front dispels the illusion of safety, the internal, the illusions of social peace.

Far from being a homogeneous block, Israeli society is rife with ethnic, religious, social and political tension: between Jews and Arabs, between religious and secular people, between liberals and hypernationalists and between the urban centers of the seaside plain and the marginalized (and generally more conservative) provinces. The degree of inequality within it is comparable to that of the United States.[102]

Until recently, the conflicting social groups within Israel, with the exception of the Arab minority, were united under the "maintenance of order and security", ensured by the army and the legislative, executive and judicial institutions of the state, in the context of an internationalized economy integrated with the networks of the global market. However, balances are disturbed, as the socioeconomic divide between the secularized bourgeoisie of European descend – which advocates for the typical liberal ideas and has long represented the ruling class – and a class, mainly of North African and Middle Eastern descent, highly religious and racist which is particularly expressed through the settler movement and electorally supported the gradual rise of Netanyahu to power. The social tensions in Israeli society have increased, for about twenty years, spearheaded by the neoliberal policies of austerity and cutbacks, expressed in a contradictory

102. Details regarding the concentration of wealth and inequalities in Israel can be extracted from the article "Israel: the shattering of a dream", Michael Roberts Blog, which was written a few days after the attack of Hamas on October 7th. This corroborates that, even though the level of poverty in the West Bank and Gaza is frightening, Isreal itself is one of the most unequal countries regarding income. The gap between the lowest and highest income (an index used by the World Bank and OECD and records the intensity of class polarization) is the second highest in the industrialized world and the percentage of child poverty is the second after Mexico among the developed countries. One in three children on average lives in conditions of poverty, whereas one in five families lives significantly under the poverty line. The inequality levels are similar to those of the USA, with the lowest 50% of the population earning 13% of the total national income, whereas the share of the upper 10% is 49%. Of course, poverty and the inequality gab are far greater for the Arab citizens of Israel, who represent about 20% of Israel's population. However, the poverty percentages are also high in the Haredi Jewish communities, which represent 14% of the population. In complete contrast, wealth accumulation in Israel is the second highest in the Western world.

way as discontent regarding the high social cost that expenses in the security and national defense sectors have.

The increasing social dissatisfaction was expressed intensely in the mass social protests of 2011 ("the tent movement" or "J14", based on the start date, July 14th), in the aftermath of the *Arab Spring*, which, for the first time, **did not** center public debate around the evergreen issue of (national) security, but inequalities, precariousness and the cost of living. Social or class issues had risen in the past, undermining the issue of national security. For example, in 1971-1972, the strongly social but ethnically restricted movement of the Black Panthers of Israel –a movement that expressed the Mizrahi– centered around issues of wages and racist discrimination, reaching even the rejection of Zionism itself.


***Let's go! (in Arabic), Egypt is here!" 300,000 demonstrators take part in a protest against cuts to the welfare state, the rising cost of living, and high rents, against the backdrop of the Arab Spring, Tel Aviv, August 2011.***

The protests in the 1980s and the 2000s against austerity, unemployment and privatizations didn't gain the mass character or public appeal of 2011. Generally, the protests against austerity or price steepness were always undermined by the agenda of national security or by ethnic/military crises. However, the years following the movement of July 2011, the public sphere is shocked by strike mobilizations that express a conflict founded on deep class opposition. In 2012 in the public sector a series of strikes and protests erupts, generally for multiple days, against inflation and skyrocketing rent prices and generally struggles that, outside the issue of housing, revolve around the increasing costs of all sectors of social reproduction (education, health, welfare).

However, the distinctive condition within the Israeli social formation is that, despite the discontent regarding the resources absorbed by the application of the policies of securitization and militarization, and despite resistances to the cutbacks, insecurity and increasing cost of living/housing, this very issue of national security from "outside threats" secures broad social consensus, which is necessary to preserve internal political stability and legitimizes socially the cutbacks of welfare in favor of militarization and renationalization. Ensuring national security constitutes the "glueing material" between conflicting social fragments, the tool to keep social demands in line. However, the political crisis within Israel is displaying the tendency to draw more intensely lines in the sand between different social groups and the normality of consensus seems shaken.

***A water cannon (with blue-dyed water) used against demonstrators during protests against the Netanyahu government, July 2020.***

The judicial reform plan Netanyahu's government intended to enforce on January 2023, just twenty days after its election, induced a broad movement of social protest. The plan had the goal to disempower the Supreme Court which had always been an important instrument of the state of Israel's policy and belongs to the most westernized bourgeois fraction. The movement that broke out against the judicial reform reflects the increasingly stronger confrontation between the legal and financial elites and the far-right religious government coalition. It was expressed, mainly, at street level—even though some sporadic strikes took place— with demonstrations, marches, street and railways stations throughout the country and clashes with the police, with the participation of hundreds of thousands of protesters which at some point reached one million. The requests it expressed went beyond opposition to the judicial system reform and the claim to democratic rights. The dynamics of the movement were such that set important issues: **the issue of the relationship between Israel and Palestinians, settler policies and unequal rights**. In particular, the social movement of 2022-23 had four spearheads:[103]

* **Against the negation of the separation of powers.** The control of the legislative and executive power is achieved in Israel through the independence of courts, which are the only institution that can defend the so-called *Fundamental Laws* of the country, which *in lack of a Constitution* comprise the foundational charter of the state. However, the government attempted to introduce a judicial reform, which would include an "override clause". That clause would allow the simple majority of Knesset to reinstate any law that was deemed by the Supreme Court to be in violation of the Fundamental Laws, de facto disempowering it. Basically, this act intended, aside from the rest, to override those few decisions of the Supreme Court that deemed the settlements on the West Bank illegal. Some of them, like the decision for the village of Ma-ale Adumim (2017), the village Khan Al-Ahmar (2018), for the Amirik settlement (2021), the demolition of illegal settlements (2022) and finally the prohibition of the settling of the Ma'ad Arif area (2023), had undermined the appeal of the government and made visible the danger of the Supreme Court exercising pressure on the government of the far-right Zionists. The

103. Regarding the content of the movement data was extracted from the following sources: "Implications of the Legal Coup" (reform.org.il), "The settlers wanted supreme power. They got a rebellion instead" (www.972mag.com), "The crisis dividing Israel: a critical moment that will determine the future of Israelis and Palestinians" (wac-maan.org.il), "How the judicial overhaul enables the Israeli settler agenda" (www.vox.com), "'Patriarchal and biased': Israeli women fear loss of rights in legal overhaul", The Guardian, 13/6/2023.

rate of settlements, however, wasn't particularly affected by these judicial decisions, and in fact in the almost three years of Netanyahu's power, the government has officially recognized 28 new settlements on the West Bank – the most important expansion since 1967, according to it. That didn't mean, however, that the decisions of the Supreme Court couldn't hinder the aspired goal of settlement in the future.

* **Against the plan to modify the law against discrimination.** According to governmental plans the law against discrimination would be modified as to expand the cases in which gender discrimination would be allowed by law. In accordance with the planned changes, businesses and state institutions, like municipalities or hospitals, could refuse to provide services, if they considered that women weren't modestly dressed enough or if encountering LGBTQI people. In addition, with the same law gendered discrimination would be allowed in public transportation, buses, trains and planes and the prohibition of women participating in radio shows or advertisements. Women's rights were also at threat by the government's plan to extend the jurisdiction of the rabbinical courts that are more conservative and reactionary than the civil ones and to litigation in accordance with the Torah (religious law) on civil cases e.g. divorces. This discrimination in the provision of services, public or private, according to the religious beliefs of the person providing the services, meant the refusal of service provision, aside from women and LGBTQI people, also to Israeli Palestinians.

* **Against the annexation of the West Bank and the apartheid.** A goal of the judicial reform was correctly recognized by many Israelis to be the elimination of the impediment by the Supreme Court to annex the West Bank and the expansion of Israeli settlements, something that reasonably occurs by what we've said here in point one.

* **Against media censorship and the restriction of union freedoms.** The government planned the asphyxiating control of the media, with a bill that would define the media it deemed hostile to its economic and political plans as anti-Israeli and traitorous. It also set in motion the restriction of the right to strike and the criminalization of unions that unionized Arab and Israeli workers.

The front against the effort to disempower the Supreme Court expanded, when 1.000 reservists, pilots and senior officers stated that they would refuse to obey orders in the case that democratic institutions are threatened. Already on March 2023, the minister of defense had publicly warned that deep internal divisions dangerously weakened the readiness of the army and could drive the enemies of Israel to attempt and exploit these weaknesses – something that Hamas took no time doing.

The political crisis of the Israeli apartheid regime is escalating, but not coincidental; it had been smoldering since 2015. Since then, the far-right fraction had accused the judges of the Supreme Court of Israel that they removed sovereignty itself –namely the authority of the final decision for the entire field of law and politics– from the elected government and transferred it to themselves. The five electoral showdowns, from 2019 until November 2022, due to the inability to form a government, are yet another example of the deep political crisis and instability. In its current phase, the internal state of Israel is no longer just divided by foreign policy or the Palestinian issue, but the **nature of the state**, its rules and legitimacy.

Distancing ourselves from reading the circumstances through geopolitical categories or through the anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist schemas, we interpret the expanded military campaigns of Israel from October 7th onwards, as an attempt to solve the exacerbation of class struggle and unsuccessfully –as it seems– restore the fragile social consensus. The genocidal war in Gaza, however, far from cementing national unity, it widened the gulf further. To the already deep political crisis was also added a security crisis. Israeli society was faced with the pathogeny of the hypermilitarization model, which sacrifices the satisfaction of social needs to the altar of security, which, however, the state cannot ultimately guarantee, a contradiction which rocks Israeli social consensus to its core, resulting in it entering a trajectory of fragmentation or even potential collapse. October 7th revealed that, as much as the Israeli state invests in national security to extract social consensus, it just as much exposes itself to various risks that threat to breach that very social consensus. This contradiction is reflected in the partial support of Hamas by Israel by easing passage through Israel, already since 2018, of millions in cash from Qatar to Gaza,[104] but also in the general division of Israeli bourgeoisie between those who benefit from capitalist peace and those who benefit from the war.

In the two years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and especially since the announcement of the ceasefire (January 2025) and its unilateral termination (March 2025), the internal conflict within Israeli society has been exacerbated to such a degree, that extremist hate speech politics have appeared in public speech, embellished by calls for revenge. Far-right self-defense groups appeared on the streets, while references were made openly, for the first time in Israel's modern history, to the threat of a civil war.[105] The increasing social fragmentation is threatening the internal stability of the Israeli state in the long term, while the polarization is extended to Israelis


***100,000 demonstrators protest against judicial reform in Tel Aviv, June 2023.***

104. "For years, Netanyahu propped up Hamas. Now it's blown up in our faces", The Times of Israel, 8/10/2023. In this article, Netanyahu is claimed to have posited, in 2019, -as we've already mentioned in the previous chapter- that all those who are against a Palestinian state should support the transfer of funds to Hamas.

105. "Is civil war on the Horizon? The Ashkenazi-Sephardic conflict and Israel's future", Middle East Monitor, 2/4/2025

of the diaspora, with an important number of American-Jews (44%) stating that they no longer recognize the values Israel advocates for.

On October 12th, 2023, one of the last protests against judicial reform took place. The movement against it, initially, was numbed by the slaughter of October 7th. Internal repression and terrorism immediately unleashed by the Israeli state managed, during the first year of the war, to significantly reduce its momentum, but the wave of social protest that had begun almost since the first month of the government's election, transformed and recovered slowly. The movement's momentum became increasingly stronger after the termination of the [first] ceasefire by Israel and peaked against the plan of the government to annex the Gaza strip.

# PART III

# 6.

# Anti-war Refusals, Rifts and Resistances within Israel

### *Israeli voices against war*

The mass mobilizations of 2022-23 was an expression of the social and political divisions running through the Israeli state. Street protests, strike actions and open conflict with state forces was the reflection of the continuous crisis of the Israeli regime, of the tacit erosion of social consensus, of class and political polarization and of the inability of the state to control the contradictions it by itself created through hypermilitarization. Despite the armed escalation that followed, social momentum didn't disappear completely. The Saturday protests which continued during the war, with, however, reduced participation in comparison to the momentum prior to October 7th of 2023, focused on the demand to **end hostilities** and **return the hostages**. The momentum of the movement against the continuation of the war, led by the Families' Forum, the biggest association of relatives of the Israeli hostages, shouldn't be underestimated. If nothing else, it was a movement that persisted during wartime, despite the suppression it received and which has gained gradually an increasingly anti-war character. For example, in early May of 2025 it condemned Netanyahu's plan to occupy Gaza, to militarize the purported humanitarian aid and displacement of its population by claiming that "more than 70% of Israel's population is against [that]",[106] while leading the great anti-war protests during August of 2025 against the plan to annex Gaza that was voted by the Knesset in the beginning that month. In these protests solidarity was expressed towards Palestinian civilians, even if by minorities of Israelis. Unquestionably, the recent (July-August of 2025) repeated mass protests exercised pressure which undermined the atmosphere of national unity in Israel, however, some Israelis have pointed out the reasonable danger of fulfilling that singular request and have Gaza continue being razed. Today, unfortunately, we find ourselves in an even worse place than even the one that ominous prediction warned: Gaza is being razed,[107] the population is displaced and the last remaining living hostages will end up, if they are not already, dead, with the Israeli state being responsible. In spite of that, if there is yet any hope of bringing this deadly policy to a halt, these mobilizations constitute the only crack capable of halting it in practice.

106. "Relatives of hostages against Netanyahu: 'He is sacrificing them for territory'", Efimerida ton Syntakton, 5/5/2025.

107. "Israelis Want the War to Stop, but Only Until the Hostages Are Released", Haaretz, 16/4/2025 and "'This Is Not Judaism': The Religious Israelis Joining Calls to End the War in Gaza", Haaretz, 5/6/2025.

Returning to the beginning of the armed conflict, on November of 2023, with central slogans *"Jews and Arabs refuse to be enemies"* and *"Stop the siege of Gaza"* many anti-war protests with an internationalist content took place with a small number of participants, which were targeted both by state suppression and far-right groups.[108] Especially after the breach of the [first] cease-fire, participation in anti-war protests increased gradually, remaining, however, in the minority until recently. The increasing social reaction to the carnage the capitalist war machine has turned on in Gaza doesn't necessarily have an emancipatory-subversive character: the participation of Israelis in the campaign of solidarity to Palestinian civilians doesn't necessarily mean we are dealing with a tendency outside the limits of the national context or democratic-humanitarian discourse. It indicates, however, that whenever and wherever a part of Israeli society can breach the methodical communication war the Israeli military machine conducts – with a special "information warfare" unit – and faces the horrific intensification of cruelty and brutality, its reaction is to refuse to submit to it.[109] And that refusal is the first step to a process of questioning national entrenchment.

***100,000 demonstrators protest against the war in Tel Aviv, August 10, 2025.***

108. "Peace Now" and "Standing Together" are the main organizations that organized marches with a clearly anti-war content. Neither of which are remotely close to what we would consider a radical organization, the first of which has in fat shown plenty of reactionary reasoning in the past, e.g. when, in 1978, it disavowed the reservists, who warned the minister of Defense that they are not willing to fight for the settlers' settlements. The second moves in the direction of collaboration between Arab Israeli and Jewish Israeli workers and of wage claims (2021, increase of minimum wage). As amusing as it may be that this organization has referred to SYRIZA as an… inspiration source and in spite of the fact that some of the founders are members of Hadash, the descendant of the Israeli Communist Party, it doesn't negate the fact that for the duration of the war until today it has consistently been on the street with anti-war content, with marches up to the Gaza passages and protests in Tel Aviv, Haifa and other smaller cities, with the participation of Arabs and Israelis.

109. For instance, the Telegram channels that broadcast images of nude, humiliated Gaza residents are monitored by the army. Indicative of the consequences the communication war that the military forces wage on both sides, by passing around deepfakes, to direct public opinion, is that according to polls an important part of the Palestinian population as well as the Israeli, refuses to believe the horrors committed by "their" sides respectively. Israelis on one hand question the losses of civilians and the famine enforced by the state of Israel, Palestinians question the executions of civilians on October 7th by Hamas.

One such moment of refusal was the formation on Holocaust Remembrance Day, in the end of April of 2025, of an initially forbidden assembly of solidarity to civilian Palestinians with the participation of several thousand protesters. Despite police suppression, the ban of even mentions of "ethnic cleansing" and the repeated confiscation of the posters with the photographs of killed children by Gaza bombings, the protesters earned their presence on the street and proceeded with the posting of anti-war posters on bus stops through the entirety of central Israel. It's indicative of the polarization of the civil war climate in Israel that on the same day, Jews and Palestinians who were celebrating, in a common ceremony, the remembrance day in the synagogue of Beit Samueli, which hosts a religious community of believers of a liberal profile, in Ra'anana city, were attacked by a far-right mob with Molotov cocktails and stones and, when escorted away by the few police forces, they were chased by cars, with the head of the Likud party in Ra'anana warning that "this is just the beginning". On April 7th, a general strike took place in Hebron and Ramla by Israeli Palestinians in particular. In spite of that, until September of 2025, in the days that the displacement of the population of the city of Gaza was taking place, we didn't see any generalized insurrection wave breaking out in solidarity by the Palestinian proletariat of Israel and the West Bank itself, which should make us wonder to how great a degree they view Hamas' "resistance" as "their" affair.

In early May of 2025, on the day of celebration of Israel's independence, some hundreds of Haredi Jews marched in the ghetto of the Mea Shearim district in Jerusalem with slogans against the war in Gaza and against the occupation.[110] It's the same district were Ben Gvir, the far-right religious Zionist, Minister of National Security, had to flee from, when its residents made it more than clear how unwanted he is. On the other hand, dozens of Jewish youths protested in view of the celebration of Jerusalem Day with hate slogans: "Death to Arabs" and "Set fire to Arab villages".


110. "Ultra-Orthodox Jews in West Jerusalem Raise Palestinian Flag in Defiance of Zionism", www.watanserb.com, 2/5/2025.

After all, for months, from the announcement of the ceasefire until today, consistently and unabatingly, two and three times a week, left-wing peace organizations are intervening in public space and as the momentum of the mobilizations increases, the character of the demonstrations are becoming more openly anti-war. In squares, main highways and IDF camps a campaign of solidarity and anti-information is starting to develop with increasingly greater resonance, regarding the genocidal cleansing taking place on the Gaza Strip, literally a hair's breadth away from Israel itself. Despite their dominant humanitarian and democratic orientation, these interventions act as cracks in national unity. As they intensify and if they connect with practices that block the material reproduction of the war machine in the West, they can transform into real nuclei of social emancipation and allow for possibilities of rupture with the core of the Israeli state.

The anti-apartheid movement wasn't born in Israel neither yesterday nor within the current conflict. On the contrary, activism against settlements in Easter Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza has a long history that is defined by longevity and persistence. Most organizations, left-wing in the genral case, participated in the mass struggles of two years prior against the judicial reform in Israel, with anti-apartheid demands. Women organizations in Palestine and Israel have formed bonds and worked together since the first years following the First Intifada. Three days before the attack of Hamas in October 2023, 1,500 Israeli and Palestinian women, who had passed from the West Bank to the other side of the Green Line, had protested in common against the occupation and during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict commonly issued the so-called "letter of the mothers". Activist groups regularly organize actions against the apartheid regime of the Israeli state in the West Bank and Gaza, for instance B'Tselem, Ta'ayush, Yesh Din, Standing Together, Youth Against Dictatorship etc. with smaller or larger momentum, others more reformist and others more radical, some of which are part of the so-called Anti-Occupation Bloc formed in 2020-21 in the protests against Netanyahu's government. The Anarchists Against the Wall (only some of which identifying as anarchists), a group born from a series of common actions of Jewish activists and Palestinians against the occupation, in the beginning of the 2000s and stayed active until 2010, had taken up direct action against the erection of the fence on the West Bank. The activists breached the gates of the fence, demolished parts of it, entered closed-off military zones, mobilized by throwing stones alongside Palestinians and got hit by teargas, rubber bullets, or occasionally real ammunition by the army side by side with them.

All these organizations are targeted in equal measure by cops, as well as by far-right pro-settlers groups. On the borders with Gaza, far-right activists are pettily blocking the entry of the humanitarian aid trucks, at the same time as pro-Palestinian left-wing organizations are collecting aid to distribute. Being active against the apartheid, military operations and bombings of civilians, these groups were faced with the accusation of treason. The statement by the police "We will show zero tolerance for those who support the enemy" after the conflicts that took place in January 16 of 2024, between Israeli cops and Anti-Occupation Bloc, is revelatory of the repression they face.

At the time these lines are being written and already since early June, Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians are, almost on a daily basis, mobilizing at the borders with Gaza and at the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv and their presence is continuously becoming more massive in an effort to break the shameful blockade of starvation and the militarization of the distribution of humanitarian aid and to end the ongoing Israeli military presence in Gaza with the daily shootings of


***1,000,000 demonstrators in a general strike against the prolongation of the war and the invasion and continued presence of the army in Gaza City, Tel Aviv, August 17, 2025.***

civilians and the bulldozers that demolish public buildings and raze villages and camps. On August 10th of 2025, a massive demonstration of 100.000 people took place in Tel Aviv, who demanded the immediate termination of the military invasion and the suspension of the large-scale military operation that targets the city of Gaza. The protests in Israel, in wait of the execution of the highly dangerous plan to fully occupy the Strip and displace the Palestinian occupation in camps in the south of the Strip, ended up numbering one million people. The mobilizations are framed by two-hour daily strikes of Israeli Palestinian shop owners, class boycott/strikes of Israeli students in 70 school units who request an end to the war and mainly the refusals of the reservists, open or tacit, to answer the new conscription, on the basis of an anti-war movement in development. According to a poll, which was conducted by the Institute of Democracy of Israel between the 24th and 28th of August, the majority of Israelis (64,5%), even among right-wingers, supports an arrangement that would include the end of the war in Gaza, the release of all the hostages and the withdrawal of IDF forces from the Strip.[111] The way the protracted war impasse acts on the momentum of a movement, which originates on one hand by the demand to return

111. "Most Israelis, Including on the Right, Back Hostage Deal That Ends Gaza War, Poll Shows", Haaretz, 3/9/2025.

the hostages, but which ultimately cannot but take into consideration that only the end of the war could guarantee that, is outlined insightfully in the words of Tamar Gozansky, in the interview she gave on the 23rd of January of 2025 to Haaretz:

> At first, people from Hadash and Maki [the Israel Communist Party, the largest faction in Hadash], who stood with demonstrators on Kaplan [the focal point of the protest movements, in Tel Aviv] and shouted slogans against the war, were accepted with a modicum of criticism. But apparently in recent months there is greater understanding that it's not possible to distinguish between the war and the hostages, and democracy and the governmental coup – that all those things are actually connected.
>
> If you observe Einav Zangauker [an activist whose son, Matan, is a hostage in Gaza], you see that her approach has undergone a substantial evolution. She was a Likudnik – and today she's in a different place.

### *Refusal to enlist during wartime*

Refusal of mobilization orders in Israel has a long history and great importance, since we are talking about a militaristic regime, as it highlights the concrete resistances of Israeli society to its militarization. However, there are voices, some of which in fact come from "our camp" that support more or less that the number of refusers is so negligible, it's not worth to even begin talking about. These cynical attempts to render "invisible" the people who choose to not serve in the army or to flee the country, should be countered. The voices of refusniks should be heard and intensified by our voices here.

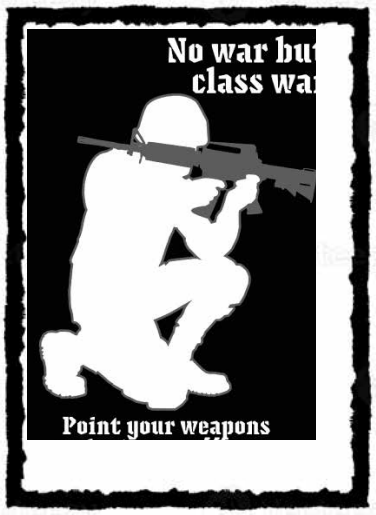
During the two-year war, refusal to report for duty started being articulated on a basis that is not necessarily anti-war in ideological terms — after all, in how many wars until today have we seen from the beginning the birth of a "pure" anti-war internationalist movement? In Israel, like elsewhere, refusals occur rather as a result of fatigue, the sense of the soldiers that they are fighting a war whose stakes they do not espouse, the disgust and the rage that its violence and profanity cause in them. This sentiment was evident after the collapse of the ceasefire, in March of 2025. Already by January of the same year, 130 open letters had been published from army reservists who threatened to refuse military service. Afterwards, 35 more soldiers entered the movement to refuse service (based on publicly available data we gathered until May 2025). Army, navy, and air force reservists united with officers from the special information group Unit 8200 and signed a letter, on April 10th of 2025, 20 days after the reinitiation of the military operation by Israel, requesting the end of the war, not just in the name of Israeli lives, but the innocent civilians in Gaza. Unfortunately, they didn't reach the point to refuse mobilization call, as they had done in July 2023, when they went against the attempted judicial reform. With the end of the (first) ceasefire, a small, but increasing minority of reservists objected to enlistment on moral grounds. One former judge of the Supreme Court called for "civil disobedience" and at the same time, the rate of response to mobilization calls is estimated to have dropped to 50%, in comparison with response on October 7th,[112] which means that more than 100.000 Israelis are claimed to have stopped showing up for their reserve duty. Also, an increased demand for passport issuance was observed (even before October 7th). It is doubtful if the 60.000 additional reservists called to

112. "40% of Israelis Say They Consider Leaving the Country. This Is What Keeps Them Here", Haaretz, 12/5/2025.

service on August of 2025 (in order to execute the plan of complete clearance of the city of Gaza and displacement of Gazans to the south of the Strip) will actually respond, something that is obviously known to the Israeli state and is the real reason it announced that their conscription process is going to last for weeks.

These facts make evident the decreasing legitimization of the war in Israeli society, a society which is steeped in obsession with security and in which the police-military operations after October 7th are presented in the public sphere systematically and en masse as "justified defense" against "Palestinian terrorism". According to Ishai Menuchin, one of the leaders of the refusal movement Yesh Gvul: "Refusal comes in waves and this is the biggest wave since the First Lebanon War, in 1982".

The reasons are definitely varied and we are not trying, of course, to claim that it's an organized political anti-war action. However, just as in the wave of protests against the war in Vietnam, the horror of war and the realization that satisfaction of social needs has nothing to do with its execution are what leads to its refusal, as it envelops. The slogan of the American objectors to mobilization in the Vietnam war *"We won't fight another rich man's war!!!"* and statements like those of an anonymous Israeli soldier *"Today's war in Gaza aims to purchase political stability with blood. I will not participate in it"* which are multiplying in public discourse in Israel, do not seem to be that far apart.




The majority of those who defy orders of enlistment are known as "grey refuseniks" — people who don't have a specific ideological objection to war, but rather feel that they don't identify with the objectives of the war and that they are led around by state aspirations that have nothing to do with their needs. According to research data by the Employment Service,[113] 48% of reservists report significant income loss since October 7th and 41% that they were fired or were forced to leave their job, due to their extended stay in reserve. Financial reasons seem to have played their part in objecting to enlistment. In addition, there are now signs of a mental health crisis in the soldiers who fought in Gaza, due to the brutalities and crimes they saw being committed or in which they participated themselves, following orders of their superiors. According to a study by the University of Tel Aviv, about 12% of the reservists who took part in the Gaza operations present "significant" post-traumatic symptoms, whereas the mental health unit of IDF's combatants reports that roughly 3.000 reservists asked for help (up from the around 270 per year before 2023, an increase of about 1000%), whereas an explosion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnoses is apparent in the general population (and indirectly in the people eligible for enlistment), with the three big health funds (Maccabi, Leumi, Meuhedet) reporting almost double amounts of new PTSD diagnoses after October 7th. According to Haaretz, there is a sharp increase in suicides (about 20 in 2024) mainly connected to post-traumatic stress caused by participation in military operations in Gaza, and 16 more suicide cases have become known until early August 2025. *"We are mentally ill and our friends are killing themselves!"*: outraged soldiers

113. "The Israeli army is facing its biggest refusal crisis in decades", www.972mag.com, 11/4/2025.

are yelling, throwing stacks of their psychiatric medication (mainly fentanyl) on the table of the Parliamentary Committee, during a conversation regarding the ways to combat the increasing suicides among soldiers. The antimilitarist feminist organization New Profile, whose funding was cut by the German state by demand of Israel, and which supports the army objectors, drafted the report "New Profile's statement on the 2023-2025 Gaza Genocide", on January of 2025, where it outlines in an astounding way the impact of the drawn-out war within Israel's societal fabric.

As for ideological refusal, many categories are at play. One type of refusal stems from *"What I saw in Gaza".* Another type is the lack of trust in the state, especially when people observe the "chasm between what the government said it was doing and what it was actually doing". Another additional category is a "disgust against the rhetoric of sacrifice", promoted by the religious far-right. According to statements of the members of Yesh Gvul, *"People are reacting to the idea that the collective is more important than the person, saying: 'The state has its goals, but I have my life' "*.

The organization Yesh Gvul has contacted more than 150 refusers since October 2023, whereas New Profile has dealt with several hundred such cases. New recruits who refuse mandatory military service for ideological reasons face prison sentences of several months, while Yesh Gvul only knows one reservist who was punished with a sentence of two weeks on parole for his recent refusal. *"They're afraid to put refusers in prison, because if they do, it could bury the model of the 'people's army'",*[114] they explained. *"The government understands this, and therefore it doesn't push too hard; it suffices with the army dismissing a few reservists, as if that will solve the problem"* [namely the popular appeal of enlistment refusal].

Yuval Green leads an anti-war organization called *Soldiers for the hostages* and has already rallied more than 220 reservists who refused to report for military service. He has already refused to continue serving in Gaza, after refusing to obey an order to set fire to a Palestinian house, stating that: *"There are more and more people who may not necessarily care about Palestinians but no longer feel at peace with the goals of the war."* And he continues: *"I call this 'gray-ideological refusal.' I have no way of knowing how many there are, but I'm sure it's a lot".*[115]

114. The model of the so called "people's army" in Israel is based on the conviction of David Ben Gurion that the universality that would occur by the ideal that "IDF is by the people, for the people" would contribute to the creation of cohesion between members of society, regardless of their origin. This, theoretically, would result in the formation of national identity after the state was founded. The term wants to present the army as a popular mobilization in the sense that the entire population participates in or supports military operations, so there is no division between citizens and the army. The expression is used positively by Israeli bootlickers, whereas it's used critically by antimilitarists.

115. The data comes from the article "The Israeli army is facing its biggest refusal crisis in decades", published in the independent, online, non-profit news magazine directed by a group of Palestinian and Israeli journalists, +972 Magazine.

## *Conscientious Objectors in Israel (Refuseniks)*

*"I couldn't wear a uniform that symbolizes killing and oppression. In Israel, refusing to serve for political and moral reasons carries a heavy personal cost. Socially, it may entail ostracization and shaming. Legally, because military conscription is mandatory – with certain exemptions, including for Palestinian citizens of Israel, or on specified grounds – refusing to enlist on conscientious grounds is punishable with prison time. I was repeatedly sentenced to military prison by an Israeli army colonel. In total, I served 197 days, spread over five separate terms. Until the final hours of my detention, I had no idea how many more months of prison awaited me."*

*Itamar Green, 18 year-old Israeli activist, who refuses to serve in the Israeli army*
*March 20, 2025,*
*Interview with Amnesty International.*


***Conscientious objectors burn their conscription papers.***

The movement of conscientious objectors in Israel is one of the most persistent and organized movements of refusal to enlist globally. Different groups, from left-wing patriotic pacifist democratic organizations of civic society, like Yesh Gvul, Courage to Refuse and Breaking the Silence,[116] up to antimilitarist organizations, like New Profile and Mesarvot, support conscientious objectors and *"grey"* objectors to enlistment. The outlook of these organizations towards the army falls into a great spectrum: from those who only support *"the defensive role of the IDF"* and reject the

116. In circumstances like the current, where Israeli society is insistently described as fully militarized and its political constitution is presented as fascist, organizations like Yesh Gvul, Courage to Refuse, Breaking the Silence etc. constitute a fracture in the dominant narrative, even though we have no delusions regarding their limits. Their existence signifies on one hand the presence of cracks in the ideological cohesion of the national core, but their political practice remains trapped in the reproduction of the national form – whether through requests to "democratize" the military machine or through calling for a moral "redefinition" of Israeli democracy.

presence of the army on the West Bank and Gaza as against morality and law (*selective refusal*, to a degree able to be assimilated by the Zionist regime), to those that position themselves radically against the existence of an army and state (*total objection*). In the context of "selective refusal", since the 1980s and especially after the first Intifada (1987), many Israeli soldiers started refusing to serve in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. In 2002, about 500 reservists had signed the "Manifesto of the 500", stating that they refuse to participate in military operations in Palestine. Let it be noted here that among selective refuseniks are counted conservative bastards, who have occasionally refused to participate in purge operations of settler "outposts" on the West Bank, on those few occasions that the courts had issued a verdict to evict settlers.

Shministim are counted among total refuseniks, namely 18-year-old high school graduates who express their refusals, even before their time to enlist. The conscientious objectors, who come in and out of military prison and in between participate in anti-war protests, since October 2023 have reached 12. According to the Israeli Refuser Solidarity Network (refuser.org), refusal of war in Israel on that scale has not been observed for decades. Tal Mitnick, Itamar Greenberg, Iddo Elam, Soul Tsalik, Ariel Davidod, Neta Lannes Arbela, Sofia Orr, Ben Arand, Yuval Moav, Orian Mueller, Ella Keidar Greenberg are those refusers who chose to publicize their refusal, in order to inspire other recruits to do the same.

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If we dealt with these fragmented, yet insistent, anti-war voices (with any reformism that may run through them), it's because we refuse to also throw (as is done currently by the majority of the "Pro-Palelstine" movement) in the garbage any —more or less minority— actions of solidarity that arise within Israeli society and assign to them "collective responsibility" for the criminal actions of the Israeli state. We refuse to conflate society with the state and we reject practices that turn —on a personal basis— against citizens of any state, not only as cannibalistic and racist, but also completely useless. We don't see any result they could produce regarding the pain of Palestinian society, aside from expressing vindictive rationales that aren't too far from the authoritarian and brutal "logic" expressed by the president of Israel, Isaac Herzog, in October 2023, regarding the management of Palestinian civilian populations: *"It is an entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true this rhetoric about civilians not being aware, not involved."* This rhetoric about "collective responsibility" of Israelis turns against what history has proven repeatedly, that anti-war movements can intensify the legitimization crisis of the state and spark radical movements. Despite their relationship to anticapitalism not being a given, there have been points where anti-war momentum was connected directly with revolutionary movements, like in 1917 Russia and Germany of 1918-19, or with social movements, like the movement against the Vietnam war in the USA in the 1960s.

Nation-brained leftists and antiauthoritarian activists, however, reviving the national-populist slogan of the Communist Party of Greece "Yankees go home"! or "Americans, butchers of the people", brag about their "unrelenting" anti-Zionist struggle of solidarity towards the Palestinian people, often revovlving around just heckling petit-bourgeois Jewish Israeli tourists, pensioner old timers —no doubt racists— who drink beer in Crete's harbors and young Jewish louts itching for a fight in Rhodos. Another such practice of "struggle" that we heard of —a "struggle" that reflects the degradation and the helplessness of the antagonistic movement to stand up against the slaughter— is to deem Israeli residents as personae non gratae in the country. The targeting

of Israelis as such, on the basis of identity or language, replicates precisely the rationale of nationalism that fuels the war and is as such a reactionary practice.

We don't romanticize anything, of course. We are not ignorant of the program "Breath"; an aftercare program that follows the shocking military experience for the soldiers of the Israeli army, in order to support them psychologically regarding the traumatic experience of the war, and aiming at preventing the possibility of psychological fatigue and fall in morale, and therefore the possibility of refusal to return to the field of slaughter.[117] How could we utilize that, however, starting by internationalist anti-war practices of the past? We remember well —despite the current dominant opinion within leftist and anarchist milieus not seemingly wanting to illuminate those rare moments of solidarity and refusal— that in the two previous world wars, on the Asia Minor front, in the Vietnam war, the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), in the first Gulf War (1990-91)[118] and in the current front of Ukraine-Russia, it was within the soldier ranks where **refusals** occurred. The anti-war movement not only didn't construct the soldier as the "hated other", on the contrary, it addressed soldiers with anti-war leaflets, brochures and letters that were distributed at the front and called to allyship, desertion and attacking superior officers.

Internationalist calls were sometimes left without response, but other times, like in the Asia Minor front, they caused thousands of desertions, or as in WW1, they incited revolts within military bodies and fraternizations at the front.[119] In 1917's Russia, soldiers not only refused to obey, but created soviets, chased out and executed officers and left the trenches en masse, dismantling the entire eastern front; in 1918's Germany, the mutiny of the sailors in Kiel led to the revolt that toppled the Kaiser and bore the soviet of workers-soldiers; in Vietnam, American soldiers passed from passive insubordination to "fragging", by turning their weapons to their own officers;[120] In Israel, after 1982's Lebanon War, appeared movements of refusal to enlist; the supposedly enemy soldiers in Russia and Ukraine, today, are sometimes fooling their superiors, pretending that captives on either side escaped, when in reality, they release them themselves. This is happening on both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian front, in which thousands of soldiers refuse to follow orders, desert and organize mutinies. In Kiev they even reached the point of stabbing military police officers who attempted to violently enlist draft dodgers (an act known as "busification"). The refusals of the soldiers undermine the armed forces of the state and weaken the army's ability to conduct warfare and that's why anti-war movements look out for them, bring them to light, address the soldiers hoping to spark such anti-war practices and support these in any way possible when they appear.

117. "Relaxation in Greece for Israeli butchers", Efimerida ton Syntakton, 4/11/24.

118. There are many authentic testimonies of Iranian and Iraqi veterans of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) which highlight moments of solidarity and human contact, despite the intensity, the brutality of the conflict, and the attrition of trench warfare. During the 1st Gulf War deserters kept their weapons and after joining forces with the militant workers, especially in the swamps of the south and the mountains of the north, turned against their state. "Iraqi mass mutiny in the Gulf War, 1990-1991', libcom.org

119. Richard van Emden, "Meeting the enemy : the human face of the Great War", Bloomsbury, 2013. Also the article "The deserters of no-man's land". (translation), on athens.indymedia, (16/8/2025), presents the "underground" form of internationalist unity, during the battles of the 1st World War, in its mythologized version. The article in question approaches deserters more through the lens of legend and literary representation, contributing to the conversation about internationalism.

120. George Lepre, "Fragging: Why U.S. Soldiers Assaulted their Officers in Vietnam", Texas Tech University Press, 2011.

In Israeli society, the distinction between civilian and soldier is constantly in flux: mandatory service and repeated enlisting until forty (or thirty-eight for women) means that the same people move ceaselessly between military service and the daily life of capitalist peace. This exchange results in bilateral transfers of experience: the experiences of social conflicts enter the troop, whereas the barbarity of the front is disseminated back into society. Historically, this same process, as we showed, has proven explosive. The question, however, is not if the war experience is disseminated, but how; whether as intensification of social discipline, or —in conditions of crisis— as a chain that can bring the war machine to a halt. And this is the direction towards the anti-war movement in the West could have followed, as the relevant movement in Israel. This is a concern that only last month has gained ground within the less fanatical pro-Palestinian bloc, after two years of diversion and preceded by the "hunt of the Israeli tourist".

The boycotting of state and business institutions and activities that feed the Israeli side of the war does not have, at least, the extremely reactionary character of targeting Israeli identity on a personal level. Its big issue is that it sees in Israel a special type of imperialism, a special type of society led astray, which requires a special treatment (even compared to planetary military superpowers!). The problem with such a stance is that it is driven by a passive personal-consumer stance of "not becoming complicit" and not by antimilitarist internationalist fraternization. Truly, we are puzzled with the whole of the reformist left, which has been consumed for decades by morally condemning Israel and the relevant campaigning, and, didn't bother in all these years to set up at least some kind of international networking with other similar rights-based or union-based Israeli and Palestinian organizations.

The subversive activity in the "peaceful" areas of the "internal front" to actively support the anti-war struggle of the draft dodgers, of the conscientious objectors, and the protesters within Israeli society, is effective when it focuses on disrupting the functioning of the military infrastructure, e.g. of ammunition storehouses, railways, docks, airports and all the roads used to transport troops and send military material to the fronts. We can be inspired by the proletarians who sabotage the railways in Belarus and Russia, since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, to stop the delivery of military material to the front line. But also from the dock workers in Genova and Trieste in Italy who prevent the supply of weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, Israel or Yemen. On the other hand, the more spectacular attacks on the war industry, like the direct action practices of Palestine Action in Britain, the blockades of Workers for a Free Palestine in factories of BAE Systems, Elbit Systems, L3Harris, Leonardo, and others, the mobilizations in Marseilles and Genova,[121] and the refusal to load weapons in Piraeus, are moving towards a direction of blocking the war. However, they worship the weapons of the "resistance", sanctifying a nonexistent class-neutral unified defense against the "wicked Zionist evil", only aiming at the enemy of the side they support and taking the side of the other imperialist pole. Yet, in the **minefield of campism**, it's something relatively closer to an internationalist practice. They remain some of the few tangible breaks in the chain of capitalist war production. Even as they focus solely on one side

121. In the beginning of June 2025, French dock workers in Marseille refused to load a ship with 14 tons of replacement parts for machine guns of the Israeli army, built by the French company Eurolinks for the weapons company Israel Military Industries, a subsidiary of Elbit Systems. Their Genovese colleagues, Collectif des travailleurs du port de Gênes (CALP) and USB Mer et Ports (a ground level union) declared a general strike on June 20th "against the war economy we experience, which impoverishes workers", as they said. The next day, the dock workers participated in the pan-Italian demonstration in Rome, "against the increase of military spending and the destruction caused by decades of wage stagnation, which now is worsening in the name of war". More on these actions in "Genova: i portuali pronti a rifiutare di caricare il cargo di armi per Israele", www.infoaut.org, 5/6/2025.

of the front, adopting the viewpoint of the opposite national capital, the material interruption of the war's logistics reduces temporarily the capacity of that side to conduct war and restricts it in enacting direct violence. Even though such actions do not constitute, in any case, an internationalist or complete anti-war strategy, they are preferable to any moralizing campaign or the head hunt for Jewish Airbnbers in Athens. As for the university encampments in the USA, (Gaza Solidarity Encampment, spring 2024), we believe they created an experience of social unrest, which hadn't appeared within universities for years. The students connected their oppositions to the war in Gaza with broader social issues that affect them, like racism, police violence and climate change. The use of slogans like "Palestine shall be free" and the justification of attacks by Hamas with "By any means necessary" displayed the limit of the encampment movement, a nationalist approach that ignores the deeper capitalist causes for wars and limited its capacity to develop an internationalist and anticapitalist analysis and action.

The conflict in Palestine-Israel is sold incessantly like a religious myth about "good and evil", an ideological trick to justify the support of armies and states. This cheap script is sold by everyone: the media, politicians, right-wingers, left-wingers, even parts of anarchism. In Greece, various groups that dub themselves "revolutionary" and "communist" do everything they can to cheapen the idea of class struggle itself. Where they should see and support any potential for resistance and struggle by Israeli workers, they toss the Israeli proletariat in the same basket as the Israeli bourgeoisie and call for the "death" of Israel, with the excuse that it's a "fascistic state". Instead of supporting the struggle of Gazan and West Bank proletarians against "their" exploiters, they either ignore or condemn the revolting Gazan proletariat as "traitors" and "agents" and call for support of the "Palestinian" nation state. To cover up their misery, they present Israel as a "unique case" because its society is completely sated in "nationalism" and "fascism" and there is no potential for resistance. An alibi made-to-meatsure to reject any possibility for class solidarity, any fracture that could crack within the enemy camp. They do *not* search and display the refusals within Israel, and even worse they mock them and erase them from history, at the point when even big status-quo American television channels highlight the increasing wave of resistance to the war in Gaza within Israeli society.[122] Other questions arise, too. In which capitalist nation-state, really, is the national ideology not dominant? Do the state and society of Poland, Hungary, Iran or Turkey have fewer far-right characteristics to show for themselves? What treatment does the Greek state has for immigrants at its borders? Following the (irrational) logic of self-demonization, what accusation would one have to make towards themselves for being a citizen of the state, whose coast guard drowned 700 people in Pylos? What's in the head of someone who goes to the islands every summer and has fun at the beach bars of the blood-stained Mediterranean (one could wonder)? And after all, since when do radical spaces divide states between fascist and non-fascist and turn their fire only to the former?

Even in the recent massive general strike of August 17th of 2025 in Israel, where upwards of a million protesters flooded the streets against the settler plan to divide the West Bank and continue the war for the full conquest of the city of Gaza, a shallow bigoted criticism emerged that supposedly these mobilizations are made exclusively to return the hostages and that ultimately Jews are indifferent about the occurring extermination of the Palestinian population. A criticism that was answered by the Israeli Jews who participate in the anti-war movement, since in the protests there were also slogans in solidarity with Palestinians. This criticism doesn't see the

122. "Israeli captain refuses tour in Gaza saying talks of ethnic cleansing crossed a 'big red line'" στο www.cbsnews.com, 7/6/2025.

potential to end the wretched barbarity of the war in the action of the proletarian masses and the practice of struggle as a true means of radicalization, but in the actions of armed organizations and military conflict, therefore the continuation of the bloodshed. Such approaches recycle the militaristic stance as a solution. Opposing the leftist warmongering views of today, already in the '60s, Mustafa Kayati and the Situationist International saw the "solution" to the so-called "Palestinian issue" and more broadly the termination of all nationalism in the Middle East, in the development of a revolutionary proletarian movement in the area at large and not in the slaughter of the proletarians of one side by the proletarians of the other.

To conclude, instead of relying on ahistorical aphorisms about "special cases" which ultimately legitimize capitalist relations, when they are expressed within a democratic frame, it would be more useful to analyze and understand the historical context which led to these slaughters. We should stand on how capitalism in its current phase has favored the creation of new nation-states which have lost any "progressive" function, which they had in the phase of the rise of capitalism, when their formation established bourgeois parliamentarism in contrast with feudal and totalitarian authority. At least since the start of the 20th century onwards, the formation of new nation-states is used only to justify brutal ethnic cleansing, mass displacement of populations and systemic discrimination against minorities. In the end of the 40s, simultaneously with the formation of the Zionist – and also as a consequence of the double negotiation of British imperialism – also took place the mass exodus of Muslims from India and Hinduists from Pakistan, which was caused by horrible pogroms on both sides. The dissolution of Yugoslavia, more recently, led to bloody civil wars and slaughters. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the slaughters and the refugees, while it has its unique aspects, is not an exceptional evil, but, sadly, a classic product of the current capitalist period. The history of the conflict between the Jewish and Arab bourgeoisie in Palestine shows that the "national" movements of Jews and Arabs alike, even if born by the painful experience of oppression and persecution, are irremovably weaved into the conflict of opposing imperialisms and that these movements have been used to overshadow the common class interests of Arab and Jewish proletarians, by driving them to slaughter, each other for the interests of their exploiters.

***Protests in Tel Aviv against the use of starvation as a weapon of war against the population of Gaza.***

# Yesh Gvul and New Profile

**From the range of groups active in supporting draft resisters, we present only two by way of example:**

The group Yesh Gvul (lit. "There Is a Limit") was formed in 1982 during the Lebanon War, in opposition to that war and in response to the massacre in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, where Palestinian refugees were killed by Lebanese Christian Phalangists, allies of Israel. The original group was made up of soldiers serving in the Lebanon War who demanded to stop fighting there and be pulled out. They subsequently supported the first refuseniks, that is, active-duty soldiers or conscripts who refused military service, declaring that they preferred to face imprisonment. At the time, Yesh Gvul distributed leaflets at the Lebanese border to soldiers waiting to cross the borderand take part in the fighting, explaining that they had both the right and the moral duty to refuse to obey orders. Later, soldiers began to appear who refused to take part in the suppression of the Intifada in Gaza and the West Bank.

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In the 1990s, an anti-militarist group called Profil Hadash (New Profile) emerged, whose members refused to do military service, totally rejecting the army as an institution. The group's name derives from a military term. All conscripts first undergo examinations—medical and including psychiatric assessments—and are then assigned a profile, which refers to the classification of a conscript's physical fitness and is indicated by a number (cf. the Greek army's "I categories", with "I-5" corresponding to what is colloquially known as a "psychiatric exemption"). Profile 97 indicates full fitness for service, while Profile 21 indicates exemption. One of the earliest symbols of anti-militarist groups was a rifle broken in two with the slogan "Profile 21". New Profile is organised on a horizontal basis and focuses on spreading anti-militarism through open discussions and public events, collecting and documenting information on militarism, and forming anti-militarist groups outside the school environment. It assists conscripts in drafting collective statements signed by high-school seniors before they are called up for compulsory service (Shministim), in which they declare their refusal to serve; in certain years, these statements have been signed by hundreds of young people.

Let's see what the New Profile group itself says regarding refusal and evasion of military service, in the relevant section of its website (newprofile.org):

One of the main expressions of the militarism which characterizes Israeli society is the duty of obligatory conscription, required by law from all Israeli youth. Generally conscription is perceived in Israel as a natural and indisputable step, and military service is presented as an empowering period which is a necessary stage for successful civilian adult life. It is seen as a stepping stone into Israeli society. Strong social pressure to enlist is being put on Israelis, also by the education

system. For marginalized youth, conscription is presented as a unique opportunity for social mobility, supposedly providing access for education and professional skills.

In reality, as opposed to the myth of "the people's army," only less than half of youth are indeed drafted, and only around 40% complete full military service. Beyond populations who receive mass exemption from service and people exempted by the initiative of the military (mainly due to medical disabilities or criminal record), many youth choose not to enlist in order to avoid distress. Yet, this choice is often presented as a selfish act, as a recipe for social and professional impasse, and as a reason for condemnation and strong criticism. It is a choice which at times bears consequences of stigma, discrimination, and negative labeling in civil life.

Against this reality, New Profile offers support for anyone who decides to avoid or discontinue military service for any reason. One of the main projects the movement has been operating since establishment is the Counseling Network, which offers personal, bureaucratic, and legal support along the exemption process, and offers individuals relevant information–all free of charge.

Is receiving exemption from military service defined as a refusal to enlist? Depends whom you ask. In the history of the Israeli refusal movements, importance was granted to those who publicly declared their refusal to enlist as a political action of refusal–mainly refusal based upon the occupation, but also to wars in general, to chauvinism, or animal exploitation etc. Declared refusal is a public act which expresses hope for social change through refusal to serve in the military or in specific military actions. The reasons for this kind of refusal relate to morality or politics. Some see this choice as a brave action, and some political circles attribute refusers admirable characteristics such as moral strength, conscientious loyalty, and civil responsibility–and rightly so. Declared refusal on political grounds is a brave and significant choice of youth who voice an important political position. Since the beginning of the second intifada in September 2000, declared refusal became more public and organized, among other things through "Shministim letters," in which high school graduates declared their intention not to serve in the military based on political reasons. So far, some 200 refusers were imprisoned–some for successive and continuous periods. Several organizations and initiatives in the Israeli left support declared refusers and promote their campaigns.

Yet, the declared refusal movement is only the tip of the iceberg. Statistics show that in the last decade, there is a constant increase in the number of youth who avoid enlistment or discontinue military service on their own initiative, without declaring a conscientious or political reason. We could label it "avoidance of military service," but this term describes something passive, even though there is an active choice here. We can also call it "social refusal," "gray refusal" or "non-declared refusal." It is a move in which those designated for military service ask and receive exemption from service based on various exemption clauses stated in the law, without an explicit attempt to change society or to attract attention. Varied motives stand behind this phenomenon. Most avoid service for personal or economic reasons: some need to work in order to support their families; some are interested in academic studies or in a career, and feel military service is a waste of time; many others just don't feel like going to the military, or think military service might harm their psychological well being. Others, just like declared refusers, act due to social, ideological and political reasons, but prefer not to declare it publicly, in order to avoid conflict with the system or public backlash. Whatever the reason, this "gray refusal" has huge political importance in such a militaristic society. Those who choose not to enlist act against the continuous militarization of Israeli society and against the social power structure it creates. This refusal is individual,

unorganized, not public, and lacks a specific action plan, leadership, or official declaration–and yet, it has an important political significance.

New Profile joins the feminist tradition of claiming the personal is the political. From our point of view, as a movement which opposes militarism, any avoidance of military service undermines the status quo. It is a significant choice, requiring resilience and will-power, and comes with no medal of valor. Even if this avoidance of service comes from personal, economic, or family motives, it is evidence of a wider social and political change. It is related to objection to violence and to militarism, and to the choice of freedom over blind obedience.

# 7.

# Palestinian Social Struggles – Class Encounters and Shared Refusals Across the Green Line

Since the beginning of the 21st century, social antagonism has persisted on both sides of the national divide within the Israeli-Palestinian formation. Whenever it intensifies within either camp, the ruling classes move to organize the mutual slaughter between Jewish and Palestinian civilians. By suppressing every expression of class struggle, they seek to reproduce internal cohesion. Although the Israeli-Arab working class appears torn apart by nationalist antagonism, and driven ever further into division and fragmentation, working-class struggles have often intersected, crossing the national line drawn by the bourgeoisie. This is true not only of the more distant past, but of the recent years as well. Against the transhistorical anti-colonial narrative, we insist on the historicity of the social struggles that unfolded in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as of those struggles that Palestinians and Israelis managed to wage together despite racial segregation and national divisions, because such moments **pave the way** of the self-emancipation of the proletariat.

Struggles waged in defence of national identity—Palestinian, Israeli, Greek, Turkish, or any other—offer nothing but renewed subordination to relations of exploitation, merely under a different national sign and a different flag. Time and again, national liberation and anti-colonial movements have assimilated the demand for radical social transformation and recast it as a demand for national self-determination, while ultimately leaving the fundamental operations of the capitalist state intact.

If we go back to the 1920s and 1930s, we can trace an early form of Arab-Jewish unity forged among workers in the port of Haifa. Arab and Jewish workers were drawn together through shared conditions and through contact with more experienced sections of the working class, such as Egyptian workers and Jewish migrants from Europe, who brought communist and socialist ideas with them. That unity came to a brutal end with the consolidation of national borders, a process sealed in 1948 through the violent expulsion and massacre of Arab populations.[123] But even if that attempt was crushed, the idea of a common struggle of the oppressed returned in the early 1970s through a new generation of militants: the Israeli Black Panthers. The second-generation Jews from North Africa and the Arab world who rallied around the Black Panthers came to understand that the state was instrumentalizing them against the Palestinians, and that "their own" question could not be separated from the so-called "Palestinian question". On the basis of

123. The major struggles in that period took place mainly on the railways, in quarries, salt factoriesworks, bakeries, refineries, and among truck drivers protesting fuel taxes. In 1944, during a joint railway strike organized mainly by Jewish workers, Arab workers supplied them with food and clothing and held solidarity demonstrations. A general strike followed in 1946, after wildcat strikes had meanwhile broken out in other sectors as well.

this experience, they connected the class question with the ethnic one, capturing their position in the slogan: "Without peace there is no equality, and without equality there can be no peace".


***The Israeli Black Panthers, a movement strongly rooted in social issues but ethnically confined and expressing the Mizrahi population, placed questions of wages and racial discrimination at its center, going so far as to reject Zionism itself. They linked the so-called "Palestinian question" to the problems they themselves faced within Israel, thereby taking a decisive step toward connecting struggles. Some of them participated in the PLO***

Proletarian cooperation and solidarity across the national divide remained marginal for years. Over the past fifteen years, however, they have revived against the backdrop of the neoliberal assault on the welfare state and on wages. Although the Zionist labour federation, the Histadrut, has consistently worked to preserve class peace and to tie the Israeli working class to Israeli capital and its state, the Israeli working class—with the impetus the *Arab Spring* gave to social movements—has waged a series of struggles in education, healthcare and transport.

These are the sectors where Jewish and Arab Israeli workers are most likely to come together, especially in the latter two, even though education itself remains separate for Arabs and Jews. Although the underfunded education system for Arab citizens of Israel—even more underfunded than the Jewish one—operates separately, in Arabic, and through a curriculum shaped around their own culture and history, Arab teachers join their Jewish colleagues when they declare a strike, and vice versa.

In healthcare and transport, there is even more room for common struggles. In Israel's major hospitals, Arab doctors, nurses and other medical staff unite with Jewish workers in collective struggles; the same is true in transport, where Arab Egged bus drivers join Jewish workers in workplace struggles. A fuller and more detailed account of these common struggles inside Israel can be found in the supplement to this edition, *A History of Common Struggles Across the Green Line Since 2008*.

In the West Bank, class struggle has repeatedly found expression since 2011 in demonstrations and public-sector strikes. By "public sector" in the West Bank, we do not, of course, mean the thousands employed in the Palestinian Authority's security forces, but administrative, health-care, and above all the large education sector, which has gone on long and repeated strikes several times.

The particularly militant strike of 2016, centred on the demand for the payment of long-overdue wages, was the product of teachers' self-organization. The Palestinian Authority had blocked the formation of an independent union and allowed trade-union representation only through the Palestinian Authority Teachers' Union, which is tied to the ruling Fatah party. The mass mobilizations in Ramallah were met with harsh repression by Palestinian cops and security forces.

Long strikes returned in 2022 and again in 2023, with demands for the restoration of cost-of-living allowances cut in 2013, permanent wage increases, and new hires. In every one of these strikes, alongside the wage demands, the creation of an independent union remained a constant demand.

From 2011 onwards, movements of civil disobedience also emerged, such as the Freedom Riders campaign against segregation on the public transport routes—mainly buses—linking Jerusalem and the West Bank, in which Israeli activist groups also took part.[124] Between 2013 and 2015, Palestinians resisted Israeli settlement policy and the expropriation of Palestinian land through the "protest villages": temporary shelters and tent encampments set up by Palestinian activists in threatened areas, with support from Israeli groups such as Youth Against Settlements and the Popular Struggle Coordination Committee.

The impact of the *Arab Spring* gave rise, in 2011, to a mass social protest movement in Tel Aviv[125] and other major cities against the rising cost of living, and housing costs in particular.[126] As the Israeli movement began to ebb, Palestinian proletarians in the West Bank took up the baton. From 2011 onwards, they launched militant demonstrations and strikes, which peaked in the autumn of 2012 against the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Fayyad, as unemployment grew and the prices of fuel and basic goods soared.

In Gaza, social unrest over wages and prices remained far more limited. This was not because the problems were any less severe, but because Hamas crushed such protests through violent repression, arrests, torture, forced declarations of repentance, and the policing of social media. Gaza's proletarians formed informal networks such as the Palestinian Youth Movement and Gaza

124. "Introducing the Palestinian Freedom Riders", New Internationalist, 18/11/2011. The movement also drew broader participation and solidarity from Israeli conscientious objectors and from members of Israeli groups such as Anarchists Against the Wall, Breaking the Silence, Combatants for Peace, and B'Tselem.

125. The July 2011 tent movement in Tel Aviv drew its social base mainly from the proletarianized former middle strata of the metropolis: educated young people, professionals in healthcare, education and technology, along with students and graduates struggling to secure housing or stable employment. The movement expressed a crisis of social reproduction among workers who could no longer enjoy the privileges—reliable access to housing, healthcare, stable work—that had been granted to their parents during the social-democratic period. In practice, the "social justice" demanded by the movements of that period amounted to a desire to restore the privileges of the Jewish middle class, entirely disconnected from the colonial and racialized dimension of Israeli society. So, although public-sector workers and Mizrahi youth from working-class neighbourhoods also took part, the movement remained limited both ethnically and socially. Palestinian citizens of Israel participated only marginally, while Palestinians from the occupied territories were explicitly excluded. The result was a "social justice movement" that left the foundational class-racial relations of Israeli capitalism untouched, and instead expressed the internal discontent of a specific social bloc experiencing the deepening of neoliberalism.

126. In 2003, Netanyahu cut social benefits, pushed further privatizations of state-owned enterprises, froze hiring, cut wages in the public sector, and imposed anti-union laws. The OECD described poverty rates in Israel as twice the average of other developed countries. On income inequality, see also the first footnote in Chapter 5, *Israel 2023: The "Political Crisis" as a Crisis of Class Relations.*

Youth Breaks Out (GYBO). They organized through Facebook, raised the issue of repression by Hamas, especially the question of women's rights, and openly expressed their disillusionment with the entire Palestinian political system. Tellingly, the Gaza Youth Breaks Out manifesto (2010–2011), which went viral, opened with the words: "Fuck Hamas. Fuck Fatah. Fuck UN. Fuck USA. Fuck Israel. We are sick of politics".

Although the Israeli and Palestinian movements did not converge, and the Israeli one did not raise the question of abolishing apartheid, this was still clearly a moment that gave the managers of the Israeli capitalist state every reason to worry. The movement in Israel could have induced a dynamic in which the Israeli working class might have recognized that it had far deeper differences with "its own" bourgeoisie than with the Palestinian working class penned in behind walls. That did not happen. The Israeli regime had already identified such a danger during the First and Second Intifadas. The walls, and the imposition of an ever more extreme apartheid, were also meant to keep the uprisings of the Arab and Israeli working classes apart.

Yet the hundreds of factories spread across the many industrial zones in Area C of the West Bank have, since 2009, become a site of class struggle that cuts across the national divide. Through workers' committees, 20,000 to 30,000 Palestinian workers have fought sustained strike battles to win collective agreements and basic labour rights. They have been backed by the Israeli union WAC Ma'an (Workers Advice Centre in Ma'an) and by the Israeli labour federation Koah LaOvdim (Power to the Workers). In these factories, Koah LaOvdim also works alongside Kav LaOved, an NGO that provides Israeli, Palestinian and migrant workers with legal and institutional support, though without building collective forms of representation or struggle.

These independent unions put class interests before national ones and support cooperation and solidarity between different ethnic groups, unlike the Histadrut, which shows no real concern for the labour rights of Palestinians working in settlements. Against the backdrop of these labour struggles, the Jewish activist and the Palestinian worker do not appear as "enemies", but as allies in class struggle and in the defence of social rights. The social-democratic character of these unions may not seem particularly thrilling to those whose imagination is filled with guerrilla armies and war-mongering nationalist camps. Even so, in contrast to these nationalistic spectacles, they do challenge apartheid and racist divisions within the ranks of the proletariat in practice.

Their presence is particularly strong in the Atarot industrial zone, north of Jerusalem, where factories, warehouses, logistics hubs, repair shops and other workplaces employ a mixed workforce of Israelis, Arab citizens of Israel and Palestinians from the West Bank. They are also active in Mishor Adumim, the industrial park of the Ma'ale Adumim settlement east of Jerusalem, and in the Barkan industrial zone between Tel Aviv and Nablus, where there are more than 120 factories.

Work in these "industrial parks" remains in a legal grey zone. Palestinian labour law does not apply there, while the racist management of labour power ensures that Israeli labour law—the law technically governing these factories—is treated like a dead letter. Israeli apartheid does not allow independent Palestinian workers' associations from the West Bank access to these workplaces. Nor does it allow Palestinian workers legal representation in Israeli courts. Many employers still apply Jordanian legislation dating back to 1967, despite the 2007 ruling by the Israeli courts that this is illegal.

Initiatives and alliances such as the one between the Palestinian New Unions and the Israeli WAC Ma'an form a counterweight to the nationalist labour politics of the major unions. The New Unions[127] organized the wildcat strikes at the Yamit factories in 2016 and 2021,[128] and at Tal El in the Tulkarem industrial zone. WAC Ma'an legally represented Palestinian workers in Israeli courts and helped pave the way to collective agreements and wage increases in those factories.

Another form of struggle supported by Israeli activist groups is the wildcat strikes that break out from time to time at the checkpoints. Palestinian workers employed beyond the Green Line and in the settlements of Area C refuse from time to time to cross the West Bank checkpoints in protest against the way they are treated by Israeli guards. At the Sha'ar Ephraim checkpoint, with the support of Rachel Afek from Machsom Watch—an Israeli organization that visits the checkpoint regularly—such strikes have flared up every four or five years, the latest one taking place in 2014, and they have had immediate results. After a strike lasting just one day, during which thousands of workers from the Tulkarem, Nablus and Jenin areas refused to enter Israel in protest against the way they were being treated at the checkpoint, workers said it was as if a magic wand had been waved. Suddenly the checks were moving at a normal pace, and the guards were treating elderly people and women with respect—exactly as the workers had demanded in their strike the day before. If we bear in mind that in 2014 around 40,000 Palestinian workers from across the West Bank were entering Israel every day with work permits, while another 40,000 were crossing "illegally", it is easy to grasp the power of these wildcat strikes—and what they might achieve if they aimed at something more than scattered, limited victories.

The Histadrut, as a social partner of Israeli apartheid, enforces racist segregation against Palestinian workers at the most concrete level and fully went along with the system for allocating work permits. With its cooperation, Israeli apartheid stole the social insurance contributions of the Palestinian proletariat in order to meet the needs of the Israeli proletariat, especially its more lumpenized strata, which have been pushed to the illegal settlements.[129] As we can see, the material basis on which national segregation is built is highly concrete. It is on that same terrain that it has to be dismantled. That is the task of the Arab and Israeli working class. A further small step in that direction was taken in February 2020. Without intending to idealize them, the unions Ma'an and Kav LaOved managed, after an appeal to the National Labour Court, to abolish the mandatory deduction that had been taken for fifty years from Palestinian workers' wages and handed over to the Histadrut for trade-union representation they never in fact had.

127. New Federation of Trade Unions: a collective organization of Palestinian trade unions, independent and often in conflict with the Palestinian Authority. It does not cooperate with the Histadrut, unlike the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU), which is linked to Fatah and the PLO.

128. "New Unions: We Urge International Support to Palestinian Striking Workers", Labor for Palestine.

129. From the 1970s until 1994, social insurance contributions were deducted from Palestinian workers' wages, along with an additional levy for the Histadrut, just as they were from every Israeli worker. But Palestinian workers never received the benefits. They were not entitled to health insurance, unemployment benefits, pensions, or labour support from the Histadrut. In other words, they were paying into a social insurance system from which they were excluded. And where did the money go? According to complaints filed at the time and to the official ILO investigation, a large share of those contributions was used by the Histadrut and the Israeli state to strengthen infrastructure and support services in the settlements in the West Bank. These investments included industrial parks, infrastructure, employer subsidies, and similar projects. Palestinian sources and Israeli researchers estimate the total loss at more than 2 billion dollars—money paid by Palestinian workers and never returned to them.

After October 2023, WAC Ma'an acted as a support network for thousands of workers from Gaza who found themselves trapped inside Israel proper, where they had crossed to work on the day of the 7 October attack. It helped with transport, shelter and first aid. In 2024–2025, it kept up the pressure in the industrial zones for collective agreements that included wage increases. More importantly, it also mounted a large-scale legal campaign to slow down the replacement of 200,000 Palestinian workers in the factories by migrant labour, while demanding the resumption of work-permit approvals.[130]

In the end, these experiences of shared organization and coexistence through struggle offer a real counterweight to the trap of nationalism. At the very least, they point to a direction worth taking seriously, if social emancipation is to be in the horizon.

### *From the Great March of Return to the 2025 Uprisings in Gaza: Autonomous Proletarian Mobilisations and Hamas's Repressive Hegemony*

In 2018, a mass autonomous movement emerged in the Gaza Strip: the Great March of Return. Starting on 30 March—Land Day, commemorated since 1976—and continuing for months, thousands of Palestinians, mainly from the proletarian and sub-proletarian layers of the camps and neighbourhoods, gathered along Gaza's eastern border with Israel. Every Friday, thousands turned out. The movement took the form of mass marches and sit-ins near the fence that imprisoned them, as well as stone-throwing and tyre-burning. A tent camp was also set up to support the struggle. It was organised through informal social networks of activists, youths and relatives of victims. For a year, it demanded the right of Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to their homes, in line with UN Resolution 194. Inevitably, the movement also raised the demand to tear down the fence and put an end to apartheid. This was not simply a national or ideological claim. It was an eruption of social despair from a population suffocated not only by the Israeli apartheid, but also by Hamas's theocratic and authoritarian rule. The March of Return was a spontaneous outburst of collective action against two forms of domination.

This line of struggle resurfaced, in different forms, in 2021. The immediate triggers were the renewed attempt to evict Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah—as well as from Silwan, Batn al-Hawa and other parts of East Jerusalem— and the police raids on the Al-Aqsa Mosque. That new uprising became known as the Unity Intifada.

The movement against evictions in East Jerusalem had begun back in 2009. It was actively and widely supported by the Israeli Sheikh Jarrah Solidarity movement, which ended its regular presence in the neighbourhood in 2011, only after settler takeovers of Palestinian homes were either halted or delayed by the courts, and after the police had stopped raiding Sheikh Jarrah and arresting residents.[131]

130. "Ban of Palestinian workers creates powder keg in the West Bank", עמ מידבועה וגרא (wac-maan.org.il), 17/01/2024.

131. These evictions are attempts to forcibly remove Palestinian residents from homes they have often lived in for decades, and which are now being claimed by Israelis on the basis of old Ottoman deeds or pre-1948 Jewish title claims. The immediate beneficiaries are Jewish settler organizations such as Nahalat Shimon International, Ateret Cohanim, and Elad. Some of them operate as pseudo-charityable NGOs, behind which stand private investment funds and real-estate companies. In the end, these properties are gradually used forfolded into development projects: luxury housing complexes, hotels, and religious-tourist centres. Real estate at its very finest—as a tool of social cleansing.

Ten years later, when the state's "Jerusalem 2020+ Vision" of urban restructuring through racial and class cleansing returned to the fore, an autonomous proletarian movement emerged among young Palestinians organised in neighbourhood committees and grassroots collectives. Acts of resistance and solidarity spread across the West Bank, Gaza, and the mixed cities inside Israel, such as Lod and Haifa. On 18 May, thousands took part in a general strike. What emerged was a polycentric, cross-class social mobilization with anti-authoritarian features and a strong presence of youth, women, and grassroots collectives.

***Jews and Palestinians in the "Battle of Sheikh Jarrah," against evictions in East Jerusalem, August 2010.***

Although Hamas did not lead any of these movements at the outset, it moved decisively to penetrate them, with the aim of assimilating them and bringing them in line with its own military framework. In the case of the Great March of Return, it steered the mobilization away from a social and class terrain and into the language of "national resistance". It tightened its organizational control over the demonstrations, introduced military practices, and launched mortars at the very moment when Palestinian protesters were fighting with stones and Molotovs. In the end, it turned the movement into a bargaining chip in its dealings with Israel. In the case of the Unity Intifada, it once again intervened militarily by firing rockets. That made it easier for Israel to recast a social uprising as a war between armed forces. In this way, the actual content of the movement—social protest against displacement, blockade, precarity, and the control imposed over the lives of Palestinian working class—was undermined by the rhetoric of the "war of resistance". In its effort to monopolize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and eliminate every autonomous social voice, Hamas consistently promotes armed "resistance" as the only horizon. In reality, that politics is deeply repressive toward proletarian struggles.

Hamas's repressive nature was unleashed against the social protests that began to break out from 2015 onwards. In February 2015, Gaza was shaken by mass demonstrations. People poured into the streets demanding an end to the blockade, immediate reconstruction, and that donor money be turned into homes for the working class, not "villas for Hamas officials and empty promises", as they themselves put it. "We don't want to live in rented flats; we want a home of our own".

Mass rallies returned in 2017 over the issue of electricity in the Jabalia camp, in 2019 over benefit cuts and constant power outages, again in the summer of 2023, and then—most strikingly—in the spring of 2025, in the middle of the war. The slogan "We Want to Live!" (Bidna n'eesh) first

appeared in 2019 as a cry against poverty, unemployment, inflation, and the authoritarian management of everyday life.[132] Hamas responded with arrests, torture, and the lockdown of the areas in revolt. The social mobilizations of these years were, to a large extent, liberal and democratic in character. They expressed a genuine need for political and individual freedoms, transparency, and social justice. What made them radical was that they laid bare the double oppression lived by Gaza's proletariat: on the one hand, the material and biopolitical oppression exercised by the Israeli state; on the other, the institutional repression and authoritarian rule of Hamas. They gave voice to the anger of a society living under the condition of "surplus proletariat" — workers without jobs, young people without a future, a population reduced to mere survival.

***Palestinians demand an end to the war, chanting slogans against Hamas in Beit Lahia, 26 March 2025***

Even amid the bombardment, protests had already begun in January and July 2024 against Hamas's military management of the war and the destruction that followed from it. But Hamas's repressive response peaked in March 2025, when participation in protest against the slaughter broadened and began to threaten the fiction of a Palestinian unity. In places such as Beit Lahiya, Jabalia, Nuseirat and Khan Younis, mass mobilizations of besieged Gazans—men, women and children—raised their voices against the mass death being imposed on them by the Israeli state on one side and by their own "liberators" on the other. "Hamas out!" "No to war!" "Food, peace, freedom!" These were slogans that could not easily be folded back into any nationalist script. They rose out of the rubble, in conditions of near-total destruction. With no party leadership and no institutional form, these mobilizations were among the most direct and genuine acts of social refusal directed against Hamas.

Hamas did not respond with open repression straight away. At first, it claimed that such protests were only to be expected from people who had lost everything, leaving our local moralist preachers—those here possessed by the cult of weapons—stranded after they had rushed to denounce the protests as "treason". But Hamas soon returned to the elementary verbs of authentic national resistance. It unleashed paramilitary forces and militias. Arrests, torture and executions followed—among them the killing of Oday Nasser Al-Rabai on 29 March 2025.[133] The protesters were treated as enemies of power.

132. "GAZA : 'Bidna N'eesh'", dndf.org, 27/03/2025

133. Anyone who wants to can follow the full course of the protests, with references to reliable sources, in the Wikipedia entry "2025 Gaza Strip anti-Hamas protests".

From the Great March of Return in 2018 to the protests of 2025, a line of struggle can still be traced. Palestinian workers, marginalized youth, women and the displaced have been forging a language and a practice directed not only against Israeli apartheid, but also against the internal mediators of repression. Some of them clearly share the view that the future of the Palestinian struggle cannot lie neither in military fantasies nor in nationalist narratives.

Where things stand today, however, it is deeply doubtful that the Palestinians of Gaza are still in any position to launch a struggle with proletarian or even broader social characteristics. As long as it was still possible to imagine that there might be another Intifada, we argued that it would be proletarian or it would not happen at all. It would have to be built not on "martyrs", but on collective refusals. Not in military command rooms, but in the camps, the neighbourhoods and the ruins—where the need for life, not death, is born. We argued that a new Intifada that did not begin from the material interests of the poor, the excluded, the unemployed and the marginalized—an uprising cast instead in national, religious or militarized form—would not be able to endure or take on any emancipatory character. We argued that only an autonomous, mass proletarian mobilization—against both the Israeli occupation and the local powers, whether Hamas or Fatah—could have any historical horizon.

Today, faced with the ruins of Gaza and the ominous advance of mass displacement, we are left with a grim balance sheet. More than two million people in Gaza are already confined to just 20 per cent of the Strip, while the remaining 80 per cent is occupied by the Israeli army. After the capture of Gaza City, those more than two million people will be pushed into just 10 per cent of the enclave—around 35 square kilometres. Beyond that, what future is left for the Palestinian civilian population? Total dehumanization under exterminatory camp conditions in the supposed "humanitarian protection zone" in Rafah? Or "voluntary" expulsion, at a moment when neither the regimes of the Middle East, and still less the Western states, have shown the slightest willingness to accept the relocation of Palestinians driven out by this barbaric clearing of the area? Where is the "heroic Hamas" now, and where are its friends in the lecture halls and the solidarity manifestos for Palestinian militarized resistance? Hamas proved incapable of defending anything beyond its own prestige. Those who identified the cause of social emancipation with the Hamas project helped, even if unintentionally, to turn the Palestinian tragedy into a spectacle of heroic self-sacrifice. Now that spectacle has collapsed.


***A Palestinian man holds a banner reading in Arabic "Hamas does not represent us" during a protest in Beit Lahia, 26 March 2025.***

# A Chronicle of Joint Struggles across the Green Line since 2008

In 2008, a nationwide healthcare strike across Israel organised by the Israel Medical Association (IMA) and health workers' unions saw the participation of both Jewish and Arab workers (including doctors, nurses, and administrative staff).

In 2011, there were large-scale strikes in the public sector in Israel organised by Jewish workers, but in sectors such as healthcare (especially in major hospitals like Rambam and Sheba), education, and transport, these were supported by Palestinian workers, highlighting the potential for Jewish and Arab workers to unite around a common cause.

In 2013–14, a movement emerged within Israel itself aimed at improving conditions for Palestinian construction workers (recognition of Palestinian workers' rights, ensuring access to Israeli labour law, and improving working conditions). Although not large in scale, it represented an effort to push for labour reforms that would benefit both Jewish and Palestinian workers.

In 2014, in the healthcare sector, Palestinian doctors, nurses, and medical assistants joined Jewish healthcare professionals in a series of strikes against budget cuts. (According to a study published in 2025 in the Israel Journal of Health Policy Research, Arab citizens of Israel make up approximately 25% of the country's doctors, despite constituting 21% of the population, as well as 27% of nurses and dentists and 49% of pharmacists. This amounts to roughly 8,400 doctors, given that in 2022 there were a total of 33,558 licensed doctors in Israel.)

In 2016, bus drivers at Egged, both Jewish and Arab workers, went on strike together and coordinated their action to secure breaks, among other demands.

In 2017, the Israeli Builders association organized a campaign against poor working conditions and deaths on construction sites, in which Arab workers from Israel and Palestinian workers from the occupied territories participated.

In 2018, Arab healthcare workers in northern Israel, such as those at Nazareth Hospital and the Galilee Health Center, demanded better working conditions and increased funding for public hospitals in the Arab sector. They were met with solidarity from left-wing Jewish doctors and health workers, who also participated in the demonstrations, particularly those working in hospitals serving both Jewish and Arab populations. In August of the same year, more than 100,000 Arabs and Jews (the latter in a significantly smaller proportion) demonstrated in a show of unity

against the recently passed "racist" Nation-State Law in Tel Aviv, chanting: "We are all brothers. Jews and Arabs refuse to be divided!"

A movement that did not gain significant traction emerged in the education sector in 2019, demanding better pay and working conditions. In 2020–21, the Bus Drivers' Union organised joint defence committees for its members in order to protect both Arab and Jewish workers and their families from increasing violent attacks by settlers in the West Bank, while in the same year a joint protest took place in Nazareth. Palestinian workers in hospitals and clinics joined forces with Jewish workers to demand better protection during the pandemic. Their demands included higher pay for healthcare staff, increased resources, and improvements in working conditions.

# 8.

# In Defense of Proletarian Internationalism Against the Prevailing Nation-Centric Views of the Left and the Anarchist/Anti-Authoritarian Milieu

Over the past two years, the vast majority of left-wing groups and organisations, along with most of the anarchist and anti-authoritarian milieu in Greece, have lined up in proclaimed "solidarity with Palestine", as reflected both in their public positions and in their practical activity. This so-called "solidarity" is underpinned by a variety of analyses which, despite their surface differences, all converge on a political vision of a "liberation" of Palestine—whether imagined as a historical-geographical region or as a state. Yet no national liberation struggle exists in any real sense, nor did the organizations that carried out the October 7 attack actually aim at any such outcome, regardless of their proclamations, since after the Oslo Accords—and all the more so following Hamas's rise to power in Gaza—this horizon has been emptied of any real content, surviving only as wishful thinking.

The most fervent supporters of the "Palestinian resistance" do not even bother to politically or ideologically justify its armed dimension. They take it to be a de facto liberatory attempt by "the oppressed and the colonized to cast off the yoke of the occupier". Readings that engage with the complexity of the situation in the region, or even further, that seek to trace the class composition and the history of the (common or not) struggles of Palestinian and Israeli proletarians, are dismissed as a smokescreen or even as tacit support for Zionist crime. Any attempt at radical critique is denounced as a First World privilege, within the framework of a recycled and decadent Third Worldism that throws into the same blender classical Leninist anti-imperialism, Islamic radicalism, and the cult of arms and guerrilla warfare. In this way, a military confrontation structured around the management of a surplus proletariat is reinvented as revolution and popular resistance. Essentially, however, this outlook simply establishes a hierarchy between two nationalisms—Palestinian and Israeli—siding with the one that lays claim to becoming a nation-state, while branding Israeli nationalism as murderous and expansionist (as if there were any nationalism that is not).

Others—no less fervent—set out to justify their long-standing and by now complete slide into Leninist, "anti-imperialist" reasoning, thereby confirming the turn of a significant segment of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu toward anarcho-Leninism. These anarcho-Leninists claim to proceed from class positions, yet in practice, as bearers of classical anti-imperialist ideology, they smuggle national ideology back into the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu. More specifically, they frame the class struggle in Palestine as a struggle of the "people" for sheer survival, one that supposedly has to necessarily take on national-military forms, while at the same time obscuring or indiscriminately lumping together its historically distinct expressions—such as strikes and uprisings against bosses and police of every nationality. They openly advocate an alliance with

the (emerging) Palestinian bourgeoisie against the more powerful Israeli one, with the explicit aim of constituting a Palestinian nation-state, even going so far as to legitimize Hamas's hegemonic role in this process. Indeed, they insist that this should be the number one objective of the Palestinian working class.

Stripped of its Leninist illusions, however, this position reveals its real stakes: the more effective disciplining of the Palestinian proletariat and its integration into the capitalist development of a newly formed state—or, failing that, its conscription into the meat grinder of capitalist war. The recipe is a familiar one. Although nationalist to its core, this outlook presents itself as internationalist on the pretext of opposing the pro-Israel Greek state. Such a warped understanding of internationalism raises an obvious question: had the Greek state remained, as in the past, pro-Palestine—like Iran, for instance—would these "internationalists" then become pro-Israel, or would they simply align openly with their own state in the name of the peoples' anti-imperialist struggle?

Through such political contortions, they splash around in the murky waters of realpolitik, while in reality they merely regurgitate the Leninist theory of stages. Class struggle is deferred to an indefinite future and reduced to the conquest of power in the frame of a new nation-state, which is otherwise treated as a neutral apparatus whose content depends solely on who controls it. Any attempt to articulate common struggles between Israeli and Palestinian proletarians against their exploitation by Israeli capital and Palestinian subcontracting elites is exorcised as idealism. In its place, what is proposed as "realistic" is an armed, militarized struggle for the creation of a Palestinian state, in which the Palestinian bourgeoisie and working class are expected to participate together as the "Palestinian people"—as if they confronted one another as equals.

Yet even segments of the anarchist/anti-authoritarian milieu that have otherwise expressed anti-nationalist and anti-militarist positions, appear to gravitate towards an anti-colonial or anti-occupation framework when it comes to the "Palestinian question". By centering on the occupier–occupied binary, they fail to see that it is itself structured by class divisions and relations of power. Instead, they treat the anti-occupation struggle, the so-called 'resistance', supposedly unfolding through the complementary forms of armed guerilla warfare and social protest, as though it were only marked by a few internal 'distortions' that we are supposedly in no position to criticize. In effect, we are told that the "Palestinian question" is, specifically, the affair of a Palestinian—and therefore national—struggle (predominantly guerrilla in form), rather than a matter concerning the multinational proletariat of the region. Within this perspective, deserter and guerrilla fighter are thrown into the same pot. Yet so long as the primary enemy remains the occupier, rather than the bourgeois classes on either side, and so long as the dominant factions of the resistance are treated simply as treacherous hierarchical leaderships within the "good camp", those who hold such views inevitably end up endorsing the military-nationalist operations of one side—albeit with reservations about their flaws and contradictions. The sidelining of the centrality of class struggle and of the proletarian standpoint—a standpoint that is inclusive of all forms of oppression and therefore internationalist—ultimately leads to the acceptance of national binaries. Even when these currents refrain from idealizing every historical form of armed struggle in the region, and even when they criticize attempts to organize it from above, recognizing the supervisory and repressive role such structures play against those below, their focus remains on identifying supposedly anti-hierarchical features within anti-colonial struggles themselves. The result is that even the most radical moments of these struggles—for instance, those directed against the ongoing processes of primitive accumulation through displacement—are

interpreted through a national or anti-occupation lens. For this reason, they show little interest in the class composition of Palestine–Israel, in the historical formation of the Palestinian and Israeli working classes, or in their —common or not— class struggles. Even in those cases where they examine and endorse joint struggles by Israelis and Palestinians, they do so not because both groups confront their common exploiters in unity, but because the former are seen as expressing solidarity with the anti-occupation struggle of the latter.

What is ultimately shared by the positions outlined above, regardless of their point of origin, is that their critique does not aim at the totality of capitalist social relations, but rather focuses on issues of identity (ethnic, racial, gender). From these identities, a series of rigid binaries is derived (oppressor/oppressed, colonizer/colonized, imperialist/anti-imperialist), within which Israelis and Palestinians are collectively placed on each side. On the basis of these identities, a political outlook is formed that revolves around the immediate lived experience—specifically, the lived experience of the oppressed. Since only Palestinians live under this particular condition of oppression, those of us who do not inhabit this territory are deemed incapable of understanding their experience, and therefore of assessing either the form or the content of their struggles. This position seeks, by sleight of hand, to saddle anyone who attempts to foreground the complexity of the "Palestinian question" with the charge of trying to prescribe what Palestinians "want" from afar—as if such a thing were even possible in the first place.

In their most extreme form, such positions attempt to line each of us up against the wall, demanding blind adherence to the line set in practice by the dominant factions—that is, the managerial class—within Palestine. What people in Gaza themselves actually say is, of course, entirely secondary for the "anti-imperialists", compared to the pronouncements of Hamas or the PFLP. As a result, any critique of the Palestinian "resistance" that escapes the familiar binaries is immediately dismissed as a form of Western privilege. As if the only thing that concerns the Palestinian proletariat were the annihilation of the Israeli occupier and its own bare survival. As if it did not also confront a bourgeoisie of its own—one that oversees and administers it through neoliberal policies while simultaneously doing business with the Israeli state. Under this logic, the interpretation of history through the lens of class struggle is recast as a supposedly "Western-centric" approach to history. Israelis, taken as a homogeneous whole, are presented solely as bearers of "whiteness" and as colonizers engaged in the settlement of the historical territory of Palestine. In reality, settlement is also—among other things—an attempt to integrate the Israeli proletariat into the social contract of the Israeli state. The fact that one segment of the proletariat is incorporated into the welfare state does not preclude it from being mobilized against another segment of the proletariat, in this case the Palestinian one. This is not a regional anomaly but a general feature of all capitalist states. The armed racism of the settlers is the flip side, pushed to an extreme, of the ethno-racial divisions that are historically produced within the proletariat itself. What has consistently been at stake—across the confrontations between Hamas and the Israeli state, in their mutual negotiations, and in negotiations involving third Arab states—is the management of Gaza's surplus proletariat.

That said, we have no intention of burying our heads in the sand: the exploitation of the Palestinian proletariat is far removed from the conventional form of exploitation of a nationally integrated proletariat and undeniably bears colonial and racist characteristics. Furthermore, the struggles of the proletariat have, at various moments in history, unfolded alongside national liberation movements. Acknowledging this complex reality, however, does not mean obscuring the specific manner in which the class questions raised by these movements are sidelined by the

nationalist anti-imperialist currents that hegemonize them. After all, the internal contradictions of social movements are expressed through the conflicts that take place within them, and it is crucial to bring these to light. On the one hand, they reveal the brutality with which marginal or dissident "tendencies" are politically and physically crushed; on the other, they show that the struggling proletariat often comes to recognize its exploiters precisely in those presented as its allies (see, for instance, the struggles against Hamas in Gaza).

However heavy the doses of mud that are flung at minority positions within the Greek context—the positions that adopt a critical stance toward the prevailing anti-imperialist and nationalist monomania—the political bankruptcy of the "anti-imperialist" current is equally pronounced. A telling symptom of this bankruptcy is the increasingly widespread practice of attacking and ridiculing Israeli tourists visiting Greece, solely on the basis of their nationality and language, treating them wholesale as colonizers and accomplices to genocide. Without at this point examining the particular profiles of these tourists, it is nevertheless evident that within large sections of the Greek antagonistic movement there is a growing tendency to hold the entire population of Israel responsible for the military operations carried out by the Israeli state in Gaza. This kind of gang-style activism, beyond being racist and cannibalistic, seeks to sweep under the rug a basic feature of all capitalist societies: national capitalist formations **are not homogeneous** entities and are **not composed of citizens with shared interests**, but are riven by internal **class antagonisms**. Anyone who attributes collective responsibility to the Israeli society as a whole for the crimes and military operations of the Israeli state either ignores—or rather conceals—the fact that wars are most effectively undermined **from within** the very states that wage them. It is there that **anti-war movements emerge and gain momentum**, grounded in the refusal of proletarians to become cannon fodder for the war machine.

At a moment when war appears to be spreading across the Middle East, we are watching the last anti-war masks being shed, as the familiar distinction between "good" and "bad" bombs continues to hold firm.

❖

So what are those of us who live, work, and struggle within Western capitalist formations to do—given that our bosses have not yet summoned us to enlist for an impending war, and that no bombs are falling over our heads? Are we to renounce even the last remnants of critical thought we have left, applauding from afar the spectacle of the total militarization of the social question, and ultimately choosing to side with the army of the "virtuous" against the army of the "evil colonizers"? Are we to content ourselves with the reassurances offered by the supposed "experts" of the Palestinian (national) resistance, who strain to convince us that we have nothing in common with either the Israeli or the Palestinian proletariat? Or will we instead pick up the thread of genuine internationalist solidarity, by bringing to the fore the struggles against the only war truly being waged against us—the class war—whether on the terrain of capitalist peace or in the war zones?

If there is any real prospect of halting the slaughter in Gaza, it must be sought far from both the "heroic struggles of the Palestinian people" and the condemnation of all Israeli citizens as agents of the "genocidal regime." The supposedly realistic solutions offered by the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial camp lead only to the adoption of the tactics of the so-called "Palestinian

organizations", trapping any anti-war mobilizations in states not directly involved in the conflict in informal nationalistic pageantry, waving Palestinian flags.

It is clear that both the Greek state and other states within which such mobilizations take place participate, in their own way, in the war by supporting the Israeli regime. Within Western capitalist formations, then, actions aimed at blocking the war machine are of crucial importance. Over the past period, we have seen the emergence—within certain limits—of a movement of international solidarity. Hundreds of thousands of people have placed at the center, and appear to be able to unite around, a common issue—which, whether we like it or not, is a national issue—and are struggling against the annihilation of the Palestinians in Gaza, from the students who occupied 160 colleges and universities in the United States in the spring of 2024 to the hundreds of thousands who demonstrated in European metropolises, Canada, Australia, etc.

The "Global March to Gaza" in June 2025 was an important mass initiative which, for all its largely spectacular character, did succeed in placing at its center the demand for the opening of borders to save the lives of proletarians. Several Palestinian resistance organizations instructed their supporters in the West to criticize the march for lacking a more confrontational orientation. [134]Moreover, fearing a possible facilitation of population exit from Gaza, they prioritized that the civilians remain in place—even at staggering human cost—considering their presence to be of major political and strategic value. Ultimately, the sacrifice of civilians was openly framed as a necessary evil, so that a second Nakba would not unfold in Gaza and the right of return would not be irreversibly forfeited.

Practical interventions and acts of sabotage, such as those carried out in ports across different countries, constitute an experience of struggle for the proletariat that exceeds national borders. They can function both as accumulated organizational experience against the coming wars and as a hard-won instrument of internationalist struggle against all the bosses' business. However, to the extent that this activism is delimited by the national symbols of the "supported camp" and these interventions are aimed at pushing states to reshuffle their alliances, they amount to little more than lobbying, turning the task of blocking the war into the mere management of a national question.

As disgusted as we are by national symbols and the nationalizing discourse that surrounds us, we are no less concerned by the repression of pro-Palestinian speech and activism as an aspect of the curtailment of historically won political rights within bourgeois democracy. In the bans on pro-Palestine demonstrations across European cities; in the recent designation of Palestine Action in Britain as a terrorist organization and the mass arrests of its supporters; in the administrative fines imposed on pro-Palestine demonstrators in Germany; in arrests and police detentions in Athens and elsewhere; in the deportation of students and the dismissal of professors from U.S. universities—we see the continuation and escalation of the disciplinary management of the proletariat first consolidated during the pandemic with lockdowns, exit permits, contact tracing apps and vaccination passes. The German state of Saxony-Anhalt went so far as to require applicants for citizenship to sign declarations of support for Israel, while in Berlin's Arab neighborhoods, following October 7, military patrols were deployed, and schools distributed questionnaires to children in order to screen their parents' views—practices not seen since the 1930s.

134. Armed Palestinian organizations did not express any support for this initiative, while the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) called for more confrontational action, such as besieging government buildings in the West—suggesting criticism of more "peaceful" initiatives, such as the March to Gaza.

As far as we are concerned, we have chosen to look within Palestine–Israel in order to identify those (proletarian) practices that—consciously or not—seek to break beyond the limits of national interest. Where the Israeli state calls for national unity, we see minority acts of desertion. Where Palestinian organizations recruit the next generation of fighters, we see mobilizations against them by the Palestinian proletariat. We cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that the Palestinian proletariat is encircled on all sides: by the Israeli army, which subjects it to mass extermination, and by its self-proclaimed liberators, who call on it to defend a Palestinian homeland—a land that neither belongs to it, nor will belong to it under any newly constituted state form.

Even within capitalist social relations, populations across the world are granted some degree of freedom of movement. Flight from war is formally recognized, and those who flee are incorporated into state regimes of migration and asylum through the legal category of the refugee. Whether classified as refugees or as migrants, it is crucial to affirm the right of Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip in order to escape the bombs falling over their heads. The freedom of movement of (proletarian) bodies, the right to flee war, the breaking open of camps, the opening of borders—are weapons of emancipation against states, armies, and national flags and we refuse to let them be appropriated by any far-right state faction such as the Netanyahu government and the likes.

Our internationalism is not an ideological hang-up. Its sole aim is to identify the choices that we would make ourselves if war were to arrive here. Our critique of the entirety of pro-Palestine political positions does not mean averting our gaze from the horror of war; on the contrary, it affirms our conviction that war can be averted through class solidarity between proletarians on opposing sides—and the global proletariat in general. Conceptions that overinflate the militant character of one or another "subjugated people" around the world, sooner or later also lead to the nationalization of class struggles at home. And even when left-wing nationalists are still—today—rallying behind some distant national cause, history has repeatedly shown their capacity to turn, tomorrow, to the defense of their "own homeland" as well, rebranding it as a matter of class interest.

The fundamental essence of all forms of nationalism—including its anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and liberal forms—is the ideology and, above all, the practice of class collaboration, that is, of collaboration between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

This is the main reason why we oppose the so-called "national liberation" struggles. Because in order to fight against a very real class enemy (the bourgeoisie that administers the occupation, for example) the proletarians ally themselves with other class enemies and thus strengthen them and weaken their class. States, whether weaker and colonized or powerful and colonial, are nothing more than the local expression of the global capitalist state: a structure that organizes the collective exploitation of the working class by capitalists for the purposes of continued accumulation. When workers' interests tend to threaten capitalist accumulation and states face a certain degree of loss of legitimacy, they organize the violent repression of the working class. If the global proletariat has no common interests with the global bourgeoisie, why should the proletariat in the territory of Palestine–Israel have common interests with "its own" bourgeoisie? The defense of these national struggles through anti-imperialist and national liberation narratives almost demonizes the development of class solidarity between Israeli and Palestinian proletarians.

Neither the rapid pace of events and the anger they provoke, nor the pseudo-militant invocations should lead to a failure to understand the dilemmas and challenges that the Israeli state's extermination of surplus populations poses for an anti-capitalist response. Nor can suffering be used as a lever to impose obedient silence or to demand support for one side, each of which contributes in its own way to the slaughter. The proletariat is one, and as the well-known slogan goes, it has no homeland; its enemies, however, have many, and they send it to the slaughter for them.

# APPENDIX I

## TWO INTERVIEWS WITH EMILIO MINASSIAN

# I

# Gaza: An Extreme Militarization of the Class War

***Le serpent de mer***

***Interview with Emilio Minassian, 30 October 2023***[135]

**You've been interested in the Palestinian question for a long time, without being a pro-Palestine activist. What does a revolutionary critique have to say about what's happening there?**

I'd say that the first thing to consider is that there are not two camps, one Palestinian and one Israeli. These people live in the same state and the same economy. Within this Israeli-Palestinian whole—which is entirely dependent on Israel—social classes are not only determined by different legal status based on ethno-religious criteria, but are also "zoned." The Gaza Strip has been, over time, turned into a "reserve-prison" in which two million proletarians are stuck on the margins of Israeli capital. But at the end of the day, the latter remains their master. Gazans use Israeli money, consume Israeli commodities, and have identity cards issued by Israel.

The current "war" corresponds in reality to an extreme militarization of the class war.

The "one land, two peoples" analysis of the situation is nonsensical. The land does not belong to the people [proletariat], anywhere in the world. It belongs to those [bourgeoisie] who own it. This might seem very theoretical, but the mere existence of social relations on the ground shows to whom the idea of two camps belongs, i.e., the ruling [bourgeois] class.

The refugee camps in the West Bank, which we might see as the beating heart of "Palestine," are still just suburbs of Tel Aviv. I've spent nights listening to the day laborers of one of these camps talk about how the ethnicization of the workforce was taking place on the building sites of the Israeli capital: the Ashkenazi Jewish developers, the 1948 Palestinians servicing the transfer of labor from the occupied territories, and the Sephardi Jewish foremen who are also Arabic-speaking, etc. Then there are all the other imported proletarians—Thai, Chinese, and Africans—who are

135. The english translation presented here was retrieved from https://libcom.org/article/gaza-extreme-militarization-class-war. The greek translation that was used in the original publication of this book was retrieved from https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1627771/.

actually in the worst situation as they are all undocumented. None of these groups can mix, because each has a distinct place and status in the relations of productions. These worlds are not porous; they're boxed in, yet they see each other, know of one another.

Dozens of Thai agricultural workers exploited on the periphery of the Gaza Strip were killed and kidnapped by Hamas. Now, Israeli bosses are withholding wages from others to force them to work in a war zone. Any social critique worth its name should, when it comes to what is happening in Israel-Palestine, integrate the point of view of the Thai workers. This country will not belong to Palestinian proletarians any more than it will to Thai ones.

**Isn't it a bit of a cop-out to try to avoid the "national question" in Israel-Palestine?**

Israel has managed to produce a situation seen nowhere else in the world: the integration of an ethnicized—"Jewish"—proletariat into the state, against the "Arab" part of the proletariat, also ethnicized. The Israeli state accumulated a "national" capital in record time, imported a "national" proletariat, and set itself up as the guardian of the existence and reproduction of the latter, based on the notion that its own existence was threatened by another proletarian fringe, the Palestinians. But if we look beneath the phantasmagoric prism of "the State as guarantor of people's existence," it becomes easier to see that Jewish Israeli proletarians constitute something like spoils of war in the hands of the state.

This is not the case with respect to the Palestinian proletariat, whose struggles have maintained a certain autonomy, while coexisting in a complex way with the instrumental logic of their politically nationalist management.

While it might sound counter-intuitive, I think Hamas should be seen as Israel's subcontractor for the management of the Gazan proletariat. As I said, Gaza, in the last instance, "depends" on national Israeli capital. And as long as Israeli capital hasn't authorized the development of another, "Palestinian" capitalist entity at its side, the Gazan proletariat, even under siege, is regulated by its economic circuits. However, such a situation cannot function without an externalized social formation responsible for regulating the imprisoned—there are no prisons without screws.

What's happening is not an inter-imperial war. It's essentially an "internal affair" for which "national" camps act as smoke screens. There's no proletarian struggle in the current events. The militarization of antagonisms produced by Hamas and the Israeli ruling class have produced a "resistance" which contains no logic of autonomous proletarian struggle, even in infancy.

It's not a war, but rather the management of a surplus proletariat by the military means of total war, by a democratic, civilized state belonging to the central bloc of capitalist accumulation. The thousands dead there seem to me to have a particular meaning as they sketch a terrifying image of the future—of capitalist crises to come.

The management of the surplus proletariat by means of carpet bombing, in as much as it's legitimated by the central states of the capitalist world, relates, I think, what is happening to an international offensive. This international character is particularly salient in France: we're in a phase where even political slogans couched in humanist language are repressed, as soon as they

might meet with street mobilizations of the dangerous classes. There is no "importation" of the conflict. There is a global offensive. In this sense, the struggle for us in France happens right here, against France. We have our own nation to betray, always, as soon as possible.

**What does Hamas have to gain from such a situation?**

Before October 7, I had the following view of the situation. On the one hand, an offensive by the settler far-right to annex the West Bank and take control of the levers of the Israeli state. On the other, two Palestinian state apparatuses, living exclusively off rents, with the sole aim of reproducing themselves as such. I thought that these latter powers were on the defensive, and were primarily preparing themselves to confront the loss of control of their populations both in Gaza and the West Bank.

A few months ago, everyone I spoke to in the West Bank, whether leftwing academics or the armed lumpenproletariat, said the same thing: "Hamas is not supporting resistance on the ground. It's only thinking about its own interests."

And in fact on October 7 Hamas did not function according to a logic of organized struggle but like a military structure, a state. Yet its operation had the particularity of necessarily presupposing an Israeli riposte in relation to which it would be in a position of massive inferiority. Hamas behaved like a state without having the means of a state, sacrificing parts of the interests of a section of its organization and its social base in Gaza, hoping to gain more in the future. A number of leaders, too, will lose their lives in this affair.

The October 7 operation was an astonishing act on the part of a ruling class, but one which can be understood, above all, I think, by the contradictions that cut through Hamas itself. It's only a hypothesis, but it's not unimaginable that October 7 was conceived by the armed wing of Hamas without much consultation with its political direction. (It's also possible that the size of the breaks in the wall surprised even those who conceived the attack, who might have sought something more like a suicide operation, without such a collapse of the Israeli military, which then opened the door to large-scale massacres.)

Hamas's operation was in no way the fruit of a fanatical millenarian delusion. It was a risky gamble, but one which could bear fruit. The Israelis have few options: there's either negotiation or regional warfare and not much in between. But it remains a gamble, because it's not clear that Israeli capital or the state will opt for stabilization.

In any case, "massacre" by carpet bombing was practically inevitable. But that's another question, as it clearly doesn't pose a problem to the ruling classes.

**You mention that Hamas behaves like a state, but without the means of one. You also said that if it is sacrificing some of its interests, it's to gain more later. Can you develop on this?**

Simply to be recognized as part of negotiations. Probably not with a view for a peace deal, we're not there yet and I don't really think that either Hamas or Israel are interested in a global agreement. But the eradication of Hamas, from the Israeli point of view, is not seriously conceivable. By showing its military strength, Hamas is hoping to establish itself as a relevant factor in the regional balance of power.

The failure of Iran and the US to resume negotiations over the last few years proves that it's not the time for "solutions." For Hamas, everyone agrees, the attack is about blocking the American solution of a Saudi-Israeli deal. What it has to gain here is, first, to impose itself as an interlocutor with the Arab countries of the region, and second, to continue the marginalization of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization, of which Fatah is part, but also the PFLP, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) in the West Bank and in Lebanon. To conquer, that is, small markets of Palestinian representation to the detriment of its competitor, the PLO.

**Are the interests at stake really so narrow?**

I don't really know how to reply to this question. Of course, this military operation and the war it has triggered also have to be seen in a global context in which the channels of capitalist regulation are in the process of breaking down.

War is always, I think, an attempt to resolve a crisis of capitalist valorization—an operation of disaccumulation. But it's also the expression of the disruption of that balance of power which governs the relationship between state and capital. It's a moment of crisis in which the control of capital, of global capital, over the state comes loose, which enables the appropriation of the state by particular capitalist sectors, even clans of politicians. War between capitalists is not only war between imperialisms. It pits multiple players against each other, who, in the absence of safeguards, will sometimes make risky gambles, play a card to try and take advantage of an upheaval in the present balance of power. This is the kind of chain of events we are witnessing since the war in Ukraine. The frozen fronts awaken: we had Nagorno-Karabakh, now it's Gaza.

The general staff advance, try out plans, test resistances, take the plunge. It's what they always spontaneously want to do. What's been surprising about the last two years is the extent to which the safeguards holding them back seem to be breaking down.

**What is the nature of Hamas's domination over the people of Gaza? How does it prop up its power? What advantages do its leaders gain? What links (explicit or not) does it have with Israel?**

Hamas came out of the Muslim Brotherhood. As in many parts of the Arab world, it developed in the 1980s among the Palestinian petite-bourgeoisie, both in the occupied territories and in the diaspora. Since its entry into the struggle against Israel in the wake of the First Intifada, this social

base grew to include more proletarian segments, before the siege and militarization of the Gazan territory profoundly changed its nature. It found itself, as mentioned, in the position of a state apparatus, required to integrate many diverse and antagonistic interests, to juggle and arbitrate among them. At the same time, since Gaza is not a real state, Hamas also became a militia party, like Hezbollah in Lebanon.

This double evolution has a contradictory dimension. I suggest that the current war marks in a way the victory of the second – militia – logic over the first. The armed wing beat the state apparatus; the military rent circuits (coming from Iran) beat the civil rent circuits (coming from Qatar).

Hamas is an interclass movement, something which explains its erratic behavior. The commercial bourgeoisie in the West Bank ended up massively identifying with it in the middle of the 2000s: the movement won the 2006 legislative elections as a party of order, promising to end the security chaos, to quieten the arms, to combat corruption, and to develop an honest state apparatus, insuring social order, with a program of charitable social redistribution. It appeared then, paradoxically, as the anti-Intifada party, and the majority of notables of the two economic centers of the West Bank—Nablus and Hebron—were on their side at the time, while remaining linked to Jordanian economic interests. Hamas won the same legislative elections in Gaza, but by calling for and prioritizing resistance and military recruitment aimed at the lumpenproletariat in the refugee camps. This was not part of a strategy of uprisings or social movements, but a matter of military clientelism. Unlike in the West Bank, Gaza does not have a commercial and urban bourgeoisie.

The interclass nature of Hamas has not massively changed since then. It continues to use opposing mobilization strategies. The leader of its armed wing, Mohammed Deif, is a kind of mythic icon, a survivor of several assassination attempts. He's a sort of James Bond figure useful for recruiting the youth of the refugee camps. Meanwhile the leaders in three-piece suits parley in five-star hotels in Qatar eating all sorts of good food with ministers and capitalists of the Arab and Turkish world. And if it's the Mohammed Deif wing that launched an attack such as that of October 7, then the suit-and-tie wing lets it do so because it secretly hopes to reap fruits in the diplomatic corridors.

I'm more circumspect as to what the comprador bourgeoisie of Gaza City thinks, as its villas are flattened by bombs.

**What are the characteristics of the exploitation of proletarians in Gaza?**

I've spent quite a lot of time in the West Bank, but I don't know the Gaza Strip directly. Due to its political and geographical position, stuck in a space of intense capitalist accumulation, we could say that Gaza is Israel's massive "rubbish bin." But there are social divisions even in the capitalists' rubbish bins.

**Is it a kind of ghetto, then? Concretely, do the Gazan proletarians have work (formal or informal), or are they mainly a surplus population?**

'"Surplus" in the sense that work, anywhere in Gaza, doesn't allow for almost any capitalist accumulation. The capital that circulates in Gaza comes essentially from rents (and these remain very small rents), that is, from foreign aid (Iran and Qatar) and from monopoly situations (the tunnels). The profits generated don't come from the capitalist exploitation of labor. The reproduction of proletarians and valorization are two distinct processes, as they say. Bosses are almost exclusively small-scale and the state doesn't regulate anything.

Like many other peripheral places of the world, Gaza is a space completely separated from the circuits of capitalist valorization. There is no "national bourgeoisie," because there is no Gazan capital. Nor is there a "traditional bourgeoisie" as in the West Bank or in Jerusalem—those old families reliant on dusty mercantile and land capitals that remain effective within the local social relations. On the other hand, there is in Gaza a kind of new "comprador" bourgeoisie reliant on rents from circulation. It's not a class in the strict sense of the term, rather a social formation which draws its massive revenues from its intermediary position in exchanges with foreign capitalists (in opposition to a bourgeoisie whose interest is in developing the national economy).

A part of this bourgeoisie comprises the political apparatus of Hamas, because the circulating capitals issue largely from a geopolitical kind of rent, from states such as Qatar or Iran. But there are also other rents, for example those linked to capital circulating at the border with Egypt. Fortunes were built around the contraband tunnels between Gaza and Egypt, and in this instance we're looking at a kind of globalized feudalism—typically a boss-worker relation. In 2007, there were intense armed clashes between clan-based social groups and Hamas's politico-military apparatus in Rafah, in the south of the Strip, over the taxation of the commodities in circulation.

Hamas, unlike the Palestinian Authority (PA), are not in charge of public services, they don't pay wages, it's still the PA who pay these. This is, as it happens, used as a means of permanent manipulation: the PA regularly reduces the wages of Gazan civil servants to weaken Hamas.

There are, no doubt in part as a result of this, regular "social" mobilizations to reclaim dignity—typically access to water, electricity, and wages. Hamas represses them, more or less violently, but with a little reserve, giving the impression that they are wary of throwing oil on the fire. The current military offensive followed an episode of this kind over the summer. It's not hard to imagine that there is a link, or at any rate a logic, which connects these two kinds of events.

The contestation against Hamas's politico-administrative wing and the support for the fighting wing are not at all contradictory. The former attacks your dignity, the latter avenges it. Without Hamas's military wing the politico-administrative wing would no doubt have to face much more contestation in Gaza.

**You mention that you "know" the West Bank better than Gaza. Between these two territories, are there important differences or are we, on the contrary, looking at two variants of a single logic?**

The Gaza Strip has for a long time been the surplus "rubbish bin" I mentioned earlier: a tiny territory into which a stream of refugees were pushed in 1947–48, submerging the local, essentially peasant, population. There are no resources there. In the West Bank, class formation is different: there are cities and notables. There are agricultural and hydraulic resources that Israel controls. Wages are twice as high, and there are some industries, based on the relative integration of the PA's comprador class into Israeli capital. Fatah, which governs the cities, is a party without social coherence. It lost the elections in 2006 to Hamas. In 2007, supported by Israel and the US, it made a power grab to retain the levers of public power in the cities of the West Bank, "abandoning" Gaza to Hamas. Since then, it has no legitimacy based on any kind of democratic procedure. Its power is based on cooperation with Israel, which gives its nationalist discourse a dissimulatory tone. It governs enclaves separated one from the other, increasingly encircled by the settlements, into which the Israeli army regularly penetrates. The proletariat of the West Bank is much more integrated into Israeli capital than its Gazan counterpart. Lots of Palestinian laborers in the West Bank work, legally and illegally, either on Israeli territory or in the colonies. They have economic links with the 1948 Palestinian citizens of Israel, who often speak Hebrew.

**What's currently happening in the West Bank? What is Fatah doing? Are there social or political forces which have a more or less proletarian character, which might strengthen in this moment of crisis?**

The Gaza Strip seems to me to be lost at the moment from the point of view of proletarian activity. But it's different in the cities of the West Bank, where the inter-Palestinian struggle for political control has been running its course for years with autonomous manifestations of class struggle. Social control is assured both by the security apparatus of the comprador bourgeoisie, dependent on Israel, as well as urban baronies linked to Jordan. The coherence of this class continues to disintegrate, Fatah no longer regulates anything, and everyone is trying to carve out their own fiefdom at the expense of others. The expected event that was supposed to clarify all this was the death of the paranoid dinosaur Mahmoud Abbas, but things will necessarily speed up now.

For fifteen years Hamas has been asleep on the West Bank, with no direct public or military activity. They maintain discreet loyalties, but the armed groups which have reappeared in the North—in Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm—are not linked to Hamas. This passivity gave the impression that Hamas had ratified the situation there and didn't want to break the status quo. This gave it bad press among the armed groups in the refugee camps which saw it as nothing but the mirror image of Fatah: all talk with no substance, only political interests distinct from those of the people. But now, this operation clearly changes the perception of Hamas. Whether we like it or not, it's going to seriously restore their image. We already see lots of Hamas flags in demonstrations, which was unimaginable even a month ago. Will Hamas directly contest power with the PA in the West Bank? Unlikely, because its activities are strictly surveilled not only by the PA but also by Israel, and the Palestinian enclaves of the West Bank don't form a coherent territory: they can't be controlled militarily without negotiating with the Israeli army. But it could change strategy, by supporting in one way or another the activities of the armed groups.

Whatever happens, things will necessarily change. The PA will struggle to maintain its grip on security. The coherence of the politico-security class will be severely tested.

The army and the settlers, in parallel with the Gaza offensive, have launched a series of attacks on the West Bank. This offensive will intensify, with its share of massacres, more limited than in Gaza but no doubt also more "self-organized".

However, I can sense a certain excitement at the idea that the taboo imposed on the repression and immobilization produced by the PA for fifteen to twenty years can be brushed aside, and that the collapse of the police might permit the social explosion longed for for years. Class relations in the West Bank are exceptionally violent. The bourgeoisie in the West Bank has long profited from cooperation with Israel; it has gorged itself to the brim. It wouldn't be a bad thing if it felt a little fear.

**For a while there has been social contestation in Israel, against Netanyahu and in particular his judicial reforms. What effects do those struggles, if any, have on the current situation? To what extent do the "civil" protests of the Israeli population (e.g., those against judicial reform) express any such aspirations?**

This war seems to me a symptom of the loss of coherence of the Israeli capitalist class, with military unity working to cover for this loss of coherence. The Israeli military collapse on October 7 ensued from the struggle among the capitalist class, which, for the first time, reached the military institution. The struggle has been intense these last few months and spilled over onto the street. The old Israel—Ashkenazi, bourgeois, secular, and military—which accumulates capital vertically (top down accumulation through the global market: big-tech, start-up nation, etc.) in Tel Aviv clashed with the Sephardic, revanchist, far-right in power, which accumulates capital horizontally (through settlements and territorial expansion) in the hills of the West Bank. But nothing proletarian ever came out of these demonstrations. And worse, nothing democratic, in the "civil" sense you mentioned. The Israeli proletariat, despite suffering a high level of exploitation, is muzzled by its existential integration into the Israeli military.

The national unity of war temporarily sweeps this struggle among the ruling class under the carpet: everyone agrees that Gaza should be carpet bombed; everyone agrees that iron-fisted security should be instituted. Since the general mobilization, the hunt is on for the enemy within. These are the handful of leftists still around, but particularly the Muslim proletariat (the 1948 Palestinians), whose solidarity efforts, even the smallest, towards the victims of the indiscriminate bombardments are stifled. What will happen in the next few months? Will the war lead to an alignment of the ruling class around the party of settlers? Although the majority of the bourgeoisie has contempt for this party because of its religious backwardness, it remains the most adapted to a mobilization focused on the hunting down of Arabs which is unlikely to stop any time soon.

**Do you think that the purely colonial prism of analysis defines the relations between the Israeli and the Palestinian proletariat?**

Yes and no, of course.

The stakes here are less those of the exploitation of an Indigenous labor force than those of the management of a surplus proletarian population, in proportions that are unique among the centers of capitalist accumulation. For each worker with a contract to work in Israel, there's another restrained in the big enclosed suburbs which constitute the centers of settlement under Palestinian jurisdiction: the Gaza Strip and the cities of the West Bank. That's around five million invisible proletarians penned in a few kilometers away from Tel Aviv, living off their labor power day by day, guarded by soldiers to prevent them leaving their cages.

This massive enclosure, this separation between useful and surplus proletarians based on ethno-religious differences, began at the same time as the peace process, which was in reality the process of externalizing the social control of the surplus population. Before that, in the 1970–80s, Palestinians were employed in large numbers by Israeli capital.

In this sense, the term "colonial" does not quite fit the social relations which have been obtained since the beginning of the 1990s in Israel-Palestine. It also has the disadvantage of cementing the idea of an opposition between two national formations, which are in reality produced and reproduced together. Palestinian and Israeli proletarians are segments of the same whole. What's been happening since October 7 should be seen as a negotiation through violence between the Gazan subcontractor—Hamas—and its Israeli employer. This must be clearly distinguished from the struggles of the Palestinian proletariat, which are directed primarily at the subcontractors Hamas and the PA. This struggle has never stopped, but nationalist recruitment will deal it a heavy blow, at least in Gaza.

Beyond all moral considerations, the term "resistance," which evokes the colonial imaginary, seems to me inapt to describe the military operation of October 7: Hamas's interests are not those of the proletariat, they are not those—to use the current vocabulary—of the "Palestinian people." Gaza's proletariat, whatever the result of these negotiations, will be massively sacrificed—they already have been. Currently, if Israel feels confident to get rid of its subcontractor Hamas, that would imply getting rid of its Gazan surplus proletariat. One cannot go without the other.

But on the other hand, I don't think we can avoid an analysis based on the colonial.

Israel has inherited that European logic which consists in "animalizing" the workforce on the basis of racial criteria, erecting a barrier between the civilized and pre-civilized world. This paradigm is in full force in Israel, and openly so. At the moment, they massacre Gazans according to the following logic: we flood them with bombs without any other objective than to "calm them," to remind them of the hierarchy which separates human groups in this part of the world. A dog bites, the pack is shot down.

We should remember that the boundaries between the civilized and the animal are mobile. They were and remain in force among the Jewish Israeli citizenry itself. The Arab Jews (Mizrahi) or the Ethiopians (Falash Mura) were for a longtime on the wrong side of the fence, acting as a kind of Indigenous auxiliary to calm other natives.

The colonial, as inheritor of the colonial period proper, generates a kind of economy of "drives" around which social categories are built up. This is just an enlarged image of what's happening throughout the "fortress" constituted by the central countries of capitalist accumulation. We see it here in France with the immediate transfer to the domestic social scene of the "war of civilizations."

The current dynamic, with its disposal of surplus proletarians, carries with it a torrent of affects built on humiliation. Faced with the impossibility of intervening collectively on social relations, powerlessness produces a double logic of resentment: search for recognition on the one hand, revenge on the other.

Because Hamas's politicians have no bourgeoisie to rely on, no proletariat to exploit, they are led to rely on the exploitation of these affects, of which they become the incarnation—for want of anything better, for want of more.

**To come back to Israel, if we consider that its capital accumulation relies primarily on a permanent "war economy," on land appropriation, and on the more or less formal exploitation of the Palestinian proletariat, should we assume that any solution—e.g., the two-state solution—is impossible?**

Starting from the 1990s, when Israel wanted to rid itself of the management of the Palestinian labor force in the territories, it entrusted it to a subcontractor, the Palestinian Authority. But Israel didn't respect the contract which was supposed to produce a form of symbolic sovereignty. It mistreated its subcontractor [who in turn mistreated its contracted workforce]. So the subcontractor revolted: that was the Second [28/9/2000-] Intifada, in which were mixed the PA's struggle against its employer and [was counterposed upon] a full-scale proletarian struggle, both against Israel and against the PA. But the proletarian struggle was snubbed by this triangulation. After this historic sequence, the PA contract split. Israel then has a mistreated but docile subcontractor in the West Bank, and another, equally mistreated, but agitated one in Gaza. Israel can treat Hamas as the enemy all it wants, but the fact is that it cannot do without a subcontractor in this context.

Let's quickly go back over this process and its failure. Why didn't the capitalists opt for the "peace" which consisted in supporting a Palestinian "national process" in Gaza and the West Bank? What they were then offered was the opening of regional markets with the surrounding countries, the possibility of investing in countries where labor was cheap. It would have been enough to leave the PA with the attributes of a rump state, financed at arms length by external donors, while it remained a captive market. For me, the answer to this question is not clear-cut. I have two hypotheses. The first is that of the weight of "military" capital, supported by the American military rent which pours into Israel. This military capitalism, linked to the high-tech sector, is internationalized over and above the regional market. The second hypothesis puts the failure of the peace process in the context of the great catastrophe of America's attempt to reshape the Middle East in the 2000s. Israel anticipated maintaining the status quo by waiting for the easing of (military) capital circulating in the region and thereby realizing that it was possible to continue subcontracting the control of the Palestinian reserves without needing to cede anything to the authorities in place. This situation lasted for nearly twenty years. It even created the possibility

of opening new markets in the Arab world (with the so-called Abraham Accords and the Saudi-Israeli peace deal promoted by America). This is what has undoubtedly just been shattered. What October 7 showed was that Israel could not have its cake and eat it for too long: it will have to deal with the Palestinian jailers of the reserves to contain the reserve-ghettos built on its territory. Alternatively, it can just get rid of the reserves, which would certainly open a new page in the history of capitalist violence in the countries of the central accumulation bloc. This isn't impossible, but it's terrifying.

**To move beyond social divisions, is not the idea of a "Palestinian people" still operative, including among the oppressed classes?**

Social critique is, I think, first and foremost about the production of categories that make it possible to think of antagonisms in terms of social contradictions. In a context such as that of Israel-Palestine, this can seem to contort the subjective categories which circulate, on the basis of which the effects of combat are built, on what is perceived as identity.

The idea of a "Palestinian people" opposed to "Israel" is clearly operative in lots of ways: on identity cards, and in most minds, as well as a mode of legitimation during proletarian struggles.

But the ethnicization of social relations has a history which is primarily that of the ruling classes: it's the history of the formation of a Jewish capitalist bourgeoisie eradicating a feudal-mercantile Arab bourgeoisie; the fusion of this bourgeoisie into a military state, etc. Proletarians find themselves caught up in this ethnic rendering of antagonisms by the ruling classes.

We must never lose sight of the fact that the "Palestinian struggle," including that fought under the banner of Hamas, has to be read primarily as one led by the Arab ruling classes—and of those who aspire to them—for their integration into Israeli capital. The interests of proletarians, even as they at times find themselves under the banner of the national struggle, are, in the last instance, contradictory with those of their bourgeoisie.

I think solidarity should be shown not to the "Palestinian resistance" per se but to the struggles fought by proletarians against their conditions of existence. Yet proletarians will hold the flag that is available to them.

We shouldn't look at the flag, but at the struggle itself. A Palestinian flag, even a Hamas or Fatah flag, might signal struggles that will, depending on the context, escape the control of the political managers. And we needn't shit on Hamas because they are Islamists, but because they're an apparatus for controlling the proletariat, a state in the making.

Still, social critique can at times seem very cold and distant from the lived struggle which makes use of other categories. The cool way I talk about dialectical materialism differs from the way I talk about a situation unfolding before my eyes, with its violence, struggles, and subjectivities.

**In a context so full of identifications, doesn't a materialist critique run the risk of appearing too theoretical and detached?**

I feel like in this kind of a context, there's not so much a position to be held, but a point of view, a method. A revolutionary view must first of all not let itself be blinded by the autonomization of moral categories brandished by the left. At the moment, in conversations, there are two that I see constantly threatening to flatten dialectical thinking. The first is the reflex to deplore that "the proletariat is not as we would like it to be": antisemitic Muslim proletarians, racist Jewish proletarians, etc. Beyond the fact that this way of thinking, which consists of taking an intellectual position on the interiority of the proletariat, is by its nature bourgeois; it is particularly inappropriate in an antagonistic situation such as this in which no form of proletarian autonomy has manifested itself [the interviewee has developed a sudden amnesia as to the words he spoke moments earlier: "Intifada,... a full-scale proletarian struggle"].

What is currently happening is the military recruitment of the proletariat on the one hand and a straightforward massacre of surplus proletarians on the other. Some people might miss the good old days when Palestinian political formations (and, as a result, we suppose, the people itself) were on the left. This seems stupid to me. The ideology of political groups is secondary, as soon as we consider the fact that they are struggling primarily so that their leaders can produce and reproduce themselves as a ruling class. When it comes to tactics, remember that, to take one example, it was a commando of the DFLP (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), an ideologically far-left Palestinian group (with links to parts of the Israeli far-left, such as the Matzpen), which committed the massacre of twenty-two children in a school in Ma'alot in 1974.

A second problematic reflex lets metaphysics enter into the analysis, in the form of the idea of repetition, freezing the mind. It's at work in notions around the "massacre of Jews," but also around the "Palestinian tragedy." Even when they emerge spontaneously in the depths of the psyche, these ideas are not thereby more than the products of the way bourgeois thought displaces social relations into the heavenly sphere of ideas.

Let's forget about the farces and tragedies of history: history doesn't repeat itself. Unfolding antagonisms are always, first and foremost, present antagonisms.

***Le serpent de mer, 30 October 2023***

# II

# Palestine: People or Class?

***This interview was conducted during October–November 2024 by members of the group Organisation Communiste Libertaire.***[136]

## *Part A´*

*Continuing and deepening the discussion that took place with Emilio Minassian at the Quercy meetings this summer, and seeking to defend a class-based reading and perspective on the situation in Palestine–Israel, we put a number of questions to him. In the first part of the interview, we address the integration of the Israel–Palestine region into global capitalism and the class composition in Palestine. In the second part, we turn to the effects of this class composition on proletarian struggles and on the struggle for national liberation. (Courant Alternatif)*

**Introductiory remarks**

First a brief clarification about the position "I am speaking from," as is customary. I'm not Palestinian, though over the past two decades I regularly spent several months a year in the West Bank, playing the usual role of the left-wing Westerner visiting the Occupied Territories: engaging in solidarity and activism, making short documentaries, conducting studies that didn't get anywhere. It was most certainly some form of activist tourism, with an autonomous-Marxist bent to it.

Soon enough I tried to avoid the usual social pitfalls of pro-Palestinian activism, i.e. spending all my time with the professional purveyors of the oppression narrative in pre-determined encounters. Depending on the moment, the context, and my energy, I more or less managed to avoid these pitfalls, though I met unemployed and petty criminals more often than workers (not to mention female workers): the unemployed have spare time, and thieves and thugs love to share their stories of struggles against the repressive apparatus (Israeli but also Palestinian), of jail time and torture (endured in Israeli and Palestinian prisons alike).

136. The english translation presented here was retrieved from https://brooklynrail.org/2025/03/field-notes/palestine-people-or-class/. The greek translation that was used in the original publication of this book was ours, and was first published in two parts here: https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1633911/ and here: https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1635575/

Insisting that "there is such a thing as social class in Palestine" might seem out of place when Gazans have been drowning under bombs for more than a year. No doubt I would refrain from doing this, or I'd do it in another way, had I been hanging about in Gaza and not in the West Bank. But I don't insist on class in order to downplay the current massacre, but to combat the idea of a radical otherness, of an exteriority, of what is currently happening in relation to capitalist social relations, here as there. –E.M.

**You insist that Israel-Palestine constitutes a unity in the global and regional capitalist space. Would you explain this point?**

At first, the Zionist project conceived of a separate Jewish society in Palestine. This project led to the ethnic cleansing of 1947–48, which, although not completed, did produce a "Jewish" space, with most of those Jews being of European origin at that time. In 1967, with the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, previously annexed by Egypt and Jordan, the population managed by the Israeli state ceased to be mainly Jewish. Around the same time, a specifically Palestinian—no longer only "Arab"—nationalism started to emerge. One could get the impression that two "nations" were facing each other on the same land. But, up until today, no separate state entity emerged from this Palestinian nationalism, except for the administration of tiny pockets of land in Gaza and the West Bank. The territory controlled by Israel, on the other hand, is not made up of Jewish zones and Palestinian zones. A lot of majority-Palestinian zones exist within the borders of the state established in 1948, and there is a massive population of Jewish settlers in the West Bank. This territorial entity is a patchwork in which national distinctions, if we drop subjective affiliations for a moment, are themselves subject to multiple subdivisions, which, although ethnicized (including on the "Jewish" side), are social in nature and are today all part of the Israeli economy.

Starting with the "spatial unity" of Israel/Palestine is thus a way to avoid an analysis of the Palestinian question in terms of "a people without a state," unified by a common sense of belonging and of dispossession. This reading tends to essentialize national categories which are the products of social processes, and to root the violence of the Israeli state in a strict continuity from 1948 on, which does away with the place of this state within global dynamics.

What's been happening during the past year is neither a war between two national spaces, nor a project of conquest for resources and markets. It's not "the" Palestinian people which is drowned under bombs, in an existential struggle between two nations. Gaza is not outside of Israeli society. It has been integrated into the Israeli market and Israeli capital for sixty years. The Palestinians living there are, for the most part, proletarians without any resources of their own. They consume Israeli commodities paid for with Israeli currency, but are not exploited as workers. They are a surplus population ejected from the labor market by Israeli capital during the nineties, now concentrated into a vast "reserve" only a few dozen kilometers from Tel-Aviv, following the logic of animalization familiar from colonial history.

**Could you give us some details about the integration of this space (and its labor force) into the capitalist market?**

From the point of view of the market, the "Palestinian" zone emerged from the partition of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War. At the time, feudal structures dominated, though there were seeds of a merchant bourgeoisie. The British Mandate and the Zionist project marked the early stages of the proletarianization of Arab Palestinian peasants, but the real watershed was 1948 and the Nakba. Feudal lords and bourgeois fled the territory now under Israeli control, with all their belongings; while Palestinian farmers, most of them sharecroppers, were expelled from their land and packed into camps.

We can identify three cycles in the course of Israeli colonialism. During the first period (1948–67), we have a typical case of settler colonialism, directed against the Palestinian peasantry: ethnic cleansing, land grabbing, "Jewish" labor and capital. There was a corollary to this, as I said earlier, which was the import of Jewish proletarians from the Arab world, ethnicized and caught in a colonial relationship of exploitation/animalization. During this period capital accumulation unfolded under the auspices of an all-powerful planner-state controlled by the socialist Ashkenazi elites. This included a form of labor unionism integrated into the state.

During the second period (1967–90s), starting with the conquest of Gaza and the West Bank, we get to a colonial situation that includes the "exploitation of the native labor force." Israeli capitalism enters a phase of intensive integration into international capital, also through military industry. During those twenty years, the proletariat of Gaza and the West Bank camps was integrated into wage labor on a massive scale, predominantly in the least qualified sectors: construction, agriculture, etc.

The Oslo Accords opened a new phase, in which the colonial relation came to figure the Palestinian as surplus and was structured by the subcontracting of the management of this surplus. Israel kept control of the territories, went on with its offensive to destroy any remnants of the peasantry and delegated the management of the Palestinian proletariat, concentrated in closed-off urban zones, to a national leadership born out of the liberation struggle.

In this context, there was an integration between a merchant bourgeoisie who escaped the Nakba—based in Hebron and Nablus, they had fled the territories annexed by Jordan between 1948 and 1967—and the managerial class originating from the Palestine Liberation Organization. This latter class, embedded in the security apparatus of the Palestinian Authority, has a double origin: first the "overseas" cadres, arriving in Arafat's luggage between 1994 and 1996, and then the "domestic" ones, born out of the first Intifada and the Israeli jails. It's a composite class, divided into competing factions. They benefit from an "international security" rent, so to speak, but they also control entire sectors of the local economy: construction, infrastructure, telecommunications, and, last but not least, trade with Israel. All of these different sectors are linked to the Israeli market and investments.

**Doesn't the war in Gaza signal the beginning of a new phase?**

There are reasons to think that. The post-Oslo period was characterized by the development of techniques of control deployed by Israel against this increasingly unproductive proletariat: the division of the territory into micro-zones; the introduction of a delirious system of permits that controls access to work, healthcare, and travel; generalized record-keeping; surveillance of social networks; automated facial recognition, but also the systematic and massive deployment of seemingly random screenings (during arrests, at checkpoints, during the processing of applications for permits) in order to "test" behavior patterns. These technologies and the knowledge gained through them are exported on a massive scale and produce a lot of value for Israeli companies. It seems to me that last year we entered the military phase of this logic of experimentation. The ongoing practice of mass destruction and massacre not only has no limits: it is meticulous, reflexive, and controlled, though it is hard for us to tell what "victory" it is aiming at. My hypothesis is the following: the massacres in Gaza are a sequence of experimentation, and they have value for global capitalism—reminiscent of the "stop and go" logic of the global economy during COVID, with its strong "biopolitical" dimension. But this is not to be understood as a postmodern claim—the so-called logic of domination is not autonomized from capitalist relations. The surplus proletarians in Gaza have no productive function for Israeli capital, except as guinea pigs for high-tech, high-end technologies of control with their large amount of added value going straight into the international circulation of capital. Thus, bombing and profiling is being tested with the help of AI, famine is managed with meticulous attention, keeping Gazans on the verge of malnutrition (at least until now) and the procedure is similar in regards to epidemics, etc. The Western powers back this logic of military aggression to the hilt and there is no end in sight: all the political posturing calling for moderation is just that (you only have to compare the arms deliveries to Ukraine to see that no limits are imposed on Israel's war machine by its allies).

**You're talking about both a bourgeoisie and a proletariat in Palestine. Could you sketch a portrait of the class composition in Gaza and the West Bank and of the conditions of struggle between those two classes? How does their status vis-à-vis Israel determine their class membership?**

The Palestinian bourgeoisie is not a firmly constituted national class: it is, of course, dependent on its subjugation to the Israeli state and capital. As soon as they are free to do so, Palestinian capitalists (in the sense that they are of "Palestinian background") will spontaneously direct their investment outside the Palestinian territories—which means also outside of the Israeli national framework. It is certain that the Israeli occupation constrained the development of a "territorialized" Palestinian capitalist class. An American scholar, Sara Roy, popularized the notion of "de-development" to describe the way in which Israel fettered the creation of a "free" market economy—i.e. one embedded in the global market—in the occupied territories. The occupation channeled the development of capitalism in Gaza and the West Bank towards an exclusive and subordinated complementarity with the Israeli economy, shaped by the logic of subcontracting, while Israeli capitalists tailored the captive market to their own products in the territories. The Palestinian entrepreneurial bourgeoisie has every reason in the world to hate the occupation: they are trapped in the sphere of circulation as a comprador bourgeoisie, to use a Trotskyist

expression. Does that mean they share the same struggles as the proletarians from the territories? We should doubt it, unless we are naive enough to believe in trickle-down economics.

Also central to the social dynamics in the territories is the "political" bourgeoisie formed in the context of the Oslo Accords, whose destiny is linked to the management of the Palestinian proletariat. Even socially this bourgeoisie is closely linked to the latter: most of these new bourgeois ascended from its ranks. They impose themselves against the traditional ruling class (what we call the "big families"). Those "big families" pledged allegiance to this "political bourgeoisie" and had to let them into their world. The intermediate cadres (Hamas in Gaza and above all Fatah in the West Bank) constitute a management authority over the surplus proletariat "on the ground." They situate themselves at the crossroads between militant activism and the rents from their international patrons. They are simultaneously highly contested (because they do everything to "close the door behind them") and relied upon for access to wages. They used to embody a form of social advancement and class revenge by means of political struggle.

To speak of a surplus proletariat is to say not that these people do not work, but that they are restricted to the very fringes of capitalist exploitation. Most of them work occasionally, in tiny structures, mostly linked to trade, earning low-end wages and without contracts (earning around ten dollars a day, while the cost of goods is indexed to those on the Israeli market). Others, in the West Bank, manage to continue working in Israel, in construction, restaurants, or agriculture. Their situation is highly precarious and they either cross the border illegally or rely on intermediaries for access to permits that may be rescinded at any time (all of them have been suspended since October 7, 2023). These contracted workers are paid around 1400 euros, from which must be deducted the prohibitive costs of "crossing" and, often, the acquisition of work permits. In the West Bank, a peasant economy also persists, often on a "supplementary" basis and under the pressures of the colonization process. Since the inception of Zionism, there has been a continuous tendency towards proletarianization among the farmers as a direct consequence of land grabs and the profit-maximization of the land.

And then, there's the world of political rents, emerging out of the cash flows coming from international patrons to maintain some semblance of stability. These rents support the livelihoods of something like a quarter to a third of the population, keeping in mind that forty percent of the public servants working for the Palestinian Authority do so as security forces. They are paid according to the legal scale of "formal" wages, something like 450 euros a month, but the Palestinian Authority's funding by its patrons and by Israel (through a tax retrocession) is under constant threat of cutting, causing the frequent freezing of wages. Moreover, some of this political rent is hijacked by political cadres for their own use, or to support their clientele and develop their investments in the informal sector. A big part of the surplus proletariat survives thanks to these funds. This segment of the population, massively integrated into the workforce and Israel during the seventies and eighties, has become socially explosive, as when they took to the streets en masse during the two Intifadas. This population is concentrated in refugee camps, historically and to this day the reservoirs of the "dangerous classes." In Gaza as in the West Bank, from Jabaliya to Jenin, these "ghettos within the ghetto" are under constant fire from the Israeli army.

The social structure in the Occupied Territories is therefore highly unstable. The political bourgeoisie and especially its cadres are always under threat of being forced to take a step backwards, i.e. by Israel downgrading their status from collaborator to resistance fighter, and therefore of being imprisoned.

**And what about Gaza?**

In Gaza, during the period of Hamas leadership (since 2007), the centrality of the comprador bourgeoisie, integrated into the political circuits, and of political rents, has remained unchanged, but within a state of siege, meaning with even weaker investments and an exacerbated instability. The rents arise from the control of the circulation of commodities and from international patronage from Qatar and Iran. The entrepreneurs who have built up fortunes in recent years (in the tunnel economy, for example) have done so in partnership with the Hamas security apparatus.

Can we even talk of a class structure in the current situation in Gaza? Even in this kind of situation, where the future is almost completely uncertain from one day to the next, there are always groups of individuals (linked to Hamas, to clan-based military organizations, or as independent rackets) that manage to do business. But this doesn't constitute a proper class structure—or else it's the class structure of a concentration camp, with no prospects for social reproduction over time

## *Part B*

*In the first part of this interview, Minassian spoke about the integration of Israel/Palestine into global capitalism and the social composition of Palestine. Part two deals with the implications of this social composition for the proletarian and national liberation struggles.*

**Couldn't the national liberation struggle, interclassist as it may be, help ease the grip of class domination on Palestinian proletarians? Might not the Israeli colonization possibly shield the Palestinian bourgeoisie from any intensification of class contradictions?**

How is the national liberation struggle doing in Palestine today? Does it even exist? The national liberation struggle involves a certain perspective (a national state freed from the colonizer), and we could say that it stays correct as long as colonialism persists in Palestine. But what about the mobilization process? Historically, this process always unfolded around political formations, impacting the class structure.

In Palestine, national liberation was embodied in the various parties composing the PLO, agents of what we used to call the "Palestinian revolution" after the '67 War: it's around those parties (Fatah, PFLP and all the splits) that a social movement regrouped, turning all the traditional hierarchies—inherited from the feudal world—upside down. The "Palestinian revolution" saw the emergence of a managing class out of the intellectual petite bourgeoisie in exile, which, thanks to the circulation of political rents, was able to integrate proletarians from the refugee camps of Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (and sometimes even non-Palestinian proletarians from those countries) into its organizations for the struggle. The traditional bourgeoisie was not destroyed but challenged: they had to negotiate with those organizations in order to protect themselves from the armed proletarians wearing the colors of the national flag. This is the typical engine of national liberation movements: a political leadership, aiming at forming a state apparatus, absorbs a social movement with a proletarian or peasant base or, more often—as in Palestine—a base in the rural masses being proletarianized under the weight of colonial relations. During the eighties this process reached Gaza and the West Bank, but without the military dimension: the first Intifada started as a revolt of the proletarians of the occupied territories (mostly from the refugee camps), exploited by Israeli capital; this revolt was "recuperated" only later, by the PLO, to turn it into a national political movement.

What happened next? According to the "classical" model, once the political leadership takes over the state, the interests of the social movement and the political formation start to diverge, and the proles are sent back to work by the newly formed nation state, supposedly for the benefits of the masses. In the specific case of Palestine, this delinking took place before independence was achieved: after the period between the Oslo accords and the second Intifada (1993–2004), the national cadres renounced the fight for independence, content to reap the rents and markets granted by Israel. Since then, the oppression of proletarians still takes the form of Israeli occupation and colonization, but without any perspective of struggle offered by the political organizations born out of the national liberation struggle, because its leaders had been integrated into this configuration as subcontractors. This is the well-known "double occupation," widely prevalent in discussions in the West Bank.

**And Hamas took up the baton?**

In certain respects, it is true that Hamas follows the trajectory of the PLO. The social composition of its cadres is similar: educated middle class people without proper capital, coming out of the universities, trying to operate as some sort of junction between a proletarian base and the interests of the commercial bourgeoisie. Unlike the PLO, however, Hamas did not rely on any social movement. It constituted a kind of pious counter-society, hierarchical and in abeyance to the social order. Hamas integrated proletarians through recruitment, without seeking to use the autonomous activity of the proletariat as an instrument in their negotiations with the bourgeoisie.

I think we should distinguish, at least methodologically, between "struggle," based on a certain autonomy of agency, material interests, and social contradictions, and "resistance" as practiced by hierarchical military organizations such as the Al-Qassam brigades in Gaza. Hamas can legitimately proclaim itself to be part of the resistance (like Hezbollah or other military-political groups in the region), but in a militarized, hierarchical, centralized mode, separating the population from its "foot soldiers," and ready to abandon its social base and crack down on their struggles.

In the mid-2000s, some fractions inside Hamas pushed for integration into the autonomy agreement and participation in elections, with the intention to become, following the model of Fatah, Israel's subcontractor for the management of proletarians in the occupied territories. This led to their accession to power in Gaza. Since Hamas took power through military means and without negotiation with the Occupation, it could uphold its image of intransigence, but objectively it nevertheless became a local subcontractor for the management of surplus proletarians.

Over the sixteen years that Hamas has administered Gaza they managed relations with Israel (from negotiating to firing missiles), the suppression of struggles, and offered the local capitalist class an opportunity to get rich under its umbrella. Until, suddenly, Hamas abandoned its role on October 7, to reinvest in its military-political and international dimension, à la Hezbollah, I guess. In doing so, Hamas sacrificed the entrepreneur class it used to protect. We can hypothesize that this reorientation didn't happen without internal conflicts, revealing an old contradiction between its military-political branch, with a strong proletarian clientele, and its branch integrated with the Palestinian business class.

**British domination, and then Zionist colonization, the high proportion of refugees, the daily colonial violence, etc., did materially produce the identification of Palestinians as a "people" and their resistance too expressed itself in the guise of the "people." Does this construction merely reflect the ideology of Palestinian elites?**

This identification exists, of course, but we have to ask ourselves what's happening behind its back. I don't want to say that "the people doesn't exist, they are just a mystification the ruling class uses to camouflage its domination;" or, even worse, to claim that "proletarians would become conscious of their class interests, if the masks would fall."

The idea of a Palestinian people is not exclusive to the Palestinian elites—it can even be used against them. The question is: what struggles are at play inside the category of "people," openly or discreetly, between the various social segments using it? It's not because one identifies with a people that one doesn't fight from his social position.

Here we can go back to what I was saying about national liberation and interclassism. From the sixties to the nineties, the PLO needed the proletarian struggles to have a place at the table to negotiate with Israel, while the proletarians were using their "national" leadership as a way to legitimate their struggles against the elites. Inside the occupied territories, the first Intifada constituted the climax of this double logic of capture of the social movement by the political leadership, on the one hand, and of use of national struggle by the social movement, on the other. Proletarians and the national leadership struggled together, even if not without conflicts, until the period 2002–2005, when they stopped doing so.

After the debacle of the second Intifada (during which we could observe the same interclassist logic, connecting the sometimes armed proletarian rioters to the political leaders), the national leaderships started applying a logic (in the West Bank but also in Gaza) of repression against struggles, even ones mobilizing the grammar of national liberation.

Even if that seems counter-intuitive, the national cadres have been the first opponent of the proletarian struggles in the occupied territories since the failure of the second Intifada. Because it is the latter whom they confront, the cadres play the role of intermediaries between Israel and the local population. Israel freed itself from the burden of reproducing the population, handing this role over to the Palestinian leadership. Israel intervenes in the West Bank metropolises according to a logic of "raids"—and in Gaza, with pure and simple massacres.

**What about the struggles in the last twenty years, outside/against the political parties?**

To talk about what I know better (I've only been in Gaza once, in 2002), in 2015–2016 there was, in the north of the West Bank, a latent insurrection in the refugee camps against the Palestinian Authority (PA). We talked then of an "internal" Intifada, with the Balata camp (on the outskirts of Nablus) as its epicenter. This social movement was able to keep the Palestinian police at bay, opening spaces for the youth to rebuild armed groups, and was also able to impose themselves against the notables linked to the PA, in Nablus and Jenin. The clashes of spring 2021 (riots in Jerusalem, in the Palestinian cities of "1948" Israel, a military-political offensive by Hamas, the cancellation of elections by the PA) escalated the situation: the PA found itself weakened and somewhat cooled its ambitions for authoritarian rule.

What I've found interesting about the cycle of riots of 2015–2016 is that a lot of people shared the idea (only superficially contradictory) that the Palestinian administration simultaneously prevented any physical clash with the occupation and denied access to work in the Israeli economy. There was a sort of nostalgia for a time when "We worked for the Israelis during the day and threw Molotovs at them at night." That same year, a big strike broke out among the teachers hired by the PA, and the Authority managed to neutralize it, using intimidation, crackdowns, and blackmail, following the lead of "Arab" regimes of the region; nonetheless, it gave rise to a sequence of social protests shaking the foundations of its political control.

**Why is our political milieu so quiet about those struggles?**

If you listen to what people say in the West Bank, the PA and the Palestinian bourgeoisie are considered a source of oppression everywhere. But, of course, we should take into account the context of these interactions: we—the white activists on a trip to the occupied territories, are assigned a task: to bear witness against the Israeli propaganda machine. We are assigned this task by the middle classes, who in one way or another are involved in gaining access to capital (material or symbolic) from the West. In fact, no one involved in this kind of encounter expects any expressions of solidarity with the class struggle against Palestinian exploiters. So, the people caught in these "internal" (on a national level) relationships of exploitation talk about them, all the time even, but those voices are not granted a political dimension—except in moments of extreme tension, like 2015–2016 in the West Bank.

What Palestinian proletarians experience as proletarians barely reaches our ears, and that's no surprise: this lived experience is not part of the "national" that the political cadres pass on to their supporters overseas.

**What perspectives can proletarians of the region, Israeli and Palestinian, expect to have in common?**

Israel embodies a vision of a nightmarish future: one in which a state belonging to the central bloc of capitalist countries reproduces the global zoning of the labor force on its territory, the same zoning that can be observed at the level of the global division of labor. This social zoning takes place on the scale of a metropolitan area: the distance between Gaza and Tel-Aviv is barely bigger than that between Paris and Mantes-la-Jolie[a nearby banlieue]. And this zoning is grounded on ethnicity (a constant feature of Israeli history, as in many other states, even outside the context of national struggle: before the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, the Jewish proletarians "imported" from Arab countries had to pay the price).

But, in the last twenty years, the state has asserted itself as the sole custodian not only of the social reproduction of the Jewish proletarians under its control, but of their "physical" existence itself, their very survival. Today we see the enlistment of the "national" proletariat in support of its exploiters on a scale never seen before in history, against the surplus population of Gaza trapped in a concentration camp under constant bombardment.

We have to keep in mind that the struggles are taking place in such a nightmarish landscape. It is difficult to imagine those struggles capable of producing power relations strong enough to "tear apart the segmentations." The mere fact that struggles continued to unfold and leave their mark on the reproduction of social relations in the occupied territories up until last year (here, again, I'm speaking of the struggles, not the hierarchical resistance) moved and inspired me. Today, the logic of slaughter crushes everything under its weight: the autonomous activity of the Palestinian proletariat is under carpet bombing and, as long as the Jewish proletariat remains captive to the Israeli state (a situation that is unlikely to change in the near future), nothing can be negotiated through relations of force. We have indeed entered a new phase, one that hardly gives cause for hope.

**Isn't denying a material basis of the Palestinian "people" the same as giving some sort of "passive support" to the state that actually colonizes and persecutes them?**

I think it's possible to develop an analytic framework in which we can express solidarity with the struggles in Palestine without harboring any illusion about the perspectives held by the "national" socio-political apparatus. That's precisely what Socialisme ou Barbarie did during the Algerian War: nourishing an internationalist line capable of keeping a critical stance towards the NLF, grounded in a class critique.

We're living in times, in Palestine and elsewhere, in which a political incarnation of the proletariat based "on class" is nowhere to be seen. Some still identify with left-wing parties like the PFLP or the DFLP, or some hypothetical civil society at a distance from the political parties. I can understand the appeal, and during my travels I sometimes held similar views, because of some "cultural" affinity. But these parties and this civil society are riddled with class contradictions that the cadres wish to portray as secondary compared to national oppression. Yet it is the views of these cadres that one (usually) finds oneself in solidarity with, without realizing it.

I stick to the idea that social relationships prevail over political ideologies and that in order to understand the struggles that "the" national struggle claims to subsume, it is necessary, affectively and intellectually, to always "start from below," apart from political identifications.

Distinct logics are perceptible in the identification with Palestine, with the idea of Palestine, depending on class, relationship to politics and capital (either militant, cultural, etc.). This is true over there but also here, in the various expressions of solidarity. These various logics do not cohabit, nor do they converge or coalesce. They are contradictory, antagonistic, whether more or less overtly or silently.

I don't have much to say about "what is to be done." It seems to me that we should be less concerned with the different political stances within the solidarity movement (the stance towards Hamas or a hypothetical bi-national state, etc.), and more with questions about its social composition, and the practices of struggles that result from this composition. We could then position ourselves in it, with the hope of "bringing the war home"—attacking the perpetuation of social order wherever we happen to find ourselves and thus putting an end to the ongoing massacre in Gaza.

In France, the capture and control of the solidarity movement—either by the politicians of, for example, La France Insoumise, who weaponize the "Palestinian cause" to align it with the confines of their interests, or by NGOs which position themselves as interlocutors of the powers that be— represent a defeat of the proletarian, non-political component of the movement, which expressed itself forcefully during the 2014 war.

***Interview conducted by zyg in October/November 2024***

# APPENDIX II

## The example of South Africa, a history of the racist management of the proletariat

# The example of South Africa, a history of the racist management of the proletariat

## *Introductory remarks*

The term apartheid is often used to describe the regime in Israel–Palestine, since the totality of discrimination, segregation, expropriation, control of movement, and state violence implemented by the State of Israel bear direct resemblance to aspects of South Africa's apartheid regime. In our attempt to understand the complex process of capitalist exploitation and racially structured management of the working class within the social formation of Palestine–Israel, we chose to examine what occurred in a "classical" case of colonialism. If we attempt to understand apartheid in South Africa merely as a regime of discrimination grounded in race conceived as a pre-existing, transhistorical cultural category, it remains just as opaque as that of Palestine–Israel. By contrast, its essence, logic, and historical development are revealed only when it is situated within the framework of the development of capitalist relations in the region's specific historical context—that is, when we examine how class relations intertwine with the social category of race, effectively producing and reproducing the condition of "race" itself and imposing racist stratification both within and beyond the proletariat. In the following analysis, we do not aim at an exhaustive comparison of the two cases in the manner of academic comparative historiography. The parallels are useful, but also fairly evident. We turn our attention to South Africa because we believe that, in order to struggle for its emancipation, the proletariat—both in Palestine–Israel and everywhere else—must understand the nature of its oppression, a nature that is obscured by nation-centric decolonial analyses that ignore or deny class struggle.

Through our analysis of South African apartheid, we seek to highlight opposing class interests as the driving force of colonization in South Africa and the class basis of the imposition of apartheid; to examine the different character of the struggles and of the anti-apartheid movement there in relation to those in the social formation of Palestine–Israel; to investigate the role of nationalist organizations; and, finally, to analyze neoliberal apartheid in South Africa—the order that was consolidated after the repeal of the laws of classical apartheid and that displays strong similarities with the administration of the Palestinian enclaves in the post-Oslo era.

Apartheid was officially abolished in South Africa on April 27, 1994 (around the same time as the signing of the Oslo Accords) when the African National Congress (ANC) under Nelson Mandela came to power. What was seen at the time as an emancipatory process for the black working class was, in fact, a methodically planned incorporation of its struggles into the transition to a new, democratized form of capitalist management in South Africa. In reality, this marked the

conclusion of a long and deliberately complex process of bureaucratic inter-party negotiations between the ANC and representatives of the old political regime, aimed at securing a political transition that would, on the one hand, leave the interests of the (white) bourgeoisie untouched, and on the other, would place the proletariat in the wake of a (black) managerial bourgeoisie — which would undertake its incorporation into a new social formation within the framework of bourgeois democracy.

Indeed, the decision by the South African bourgeoisie to abandon classical apartheid had been made long before 1994. The social unrest of the 1970s and 1980s, together with the growing militancy of the South African proletariat, had revealed the limits of repressive management and compelled the bourgeoisie itself—under the weight of international pressure, particularly from the United States and elsewhere, aimed at ensuring political stability in the wider region—to seek a solution to the crisis in the reproduction of capitalist relations, oriented toward the incorporation of the black proletariat. The dismantling of apartheid became a real option for the South African bourgeoisie when the ANC and the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP) emerged as significant political forces, representatives of the struggle and credible dialogue partners, willing to compromise, yet also capable of controlling and constraining the demands of their social base. However, the decisive struggles that brought about the fall of apartheid were waged far from the luxurious hotels where the negotiations took place. They unfolded in townships, factories, and mines, and belong to the South African proletariat—and no one else.

## *Early Capitalism in the Cape Colony*

But let us begin at the beginning. The Cape Colony was founded in 1652 by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), initially as a staging post for ships trading with the Indonesian islands, where they could replenish supplies and carry out repairs. As the settler population expanded, growing demand for agricultural products led to the gradual displacement of local populations by Dutch landowners, the expropriation of the Khoekhoe's communal lands, and their cultivation through the use of **imported** slave labor. By the mid-19th century, large sections of the indigenous African populations—Khoekhoe, Xhosa, and Zulu—lived in distinct communities, the so-called *chiefdoms*, which remained to a significant extent **autonomous**. This autonomy limited the direct incorporation of these populations into plantation labor.

In 1806, the Cape Colony passed into the hands of the British Empire, which marked the beginning of a long process of restructuring relations of production and ownership, with the introduction of wage labor and the gradual abolition of slavery. While the British established their presence in Cape Town, the ports, and the military-administrative centers, the Dutch-speaking landowners of the Cape Colony moved into the interior and frontier regions, where they developed an independent rural identity, gradually identifiable by the term "Boer."

The coexistence of English-speaking and Dutch-speaking settlers was not neutral, as it produced a conflict between two class strategies for the organization of labor and property: on the one hand, the agrarian model of the Boers, based on personal domination and slave labor; and on the other, the British state-liberal model. Seeking to evade the control of the local British colonial government, and reacting to the abolition of slavery, during the 1830s–1840s the Boers gradually expanded into the interior under the terms of a "conquest of land" (a migration that became known as the Great Trek), displacing indigenous populations and establishing three independent polities (the Boer Republics), in which the use of slave labor continued for several decades.

As frontier Boers were gradually incorporated into the markets of the British-controlled Cape Colony, they became subject to the discipline of the market (prices, competition in agricultural goods, debt), which impoverished sections of them. Displacement and the diffuse violence of their militias **were not, in themselves, sufficient** to produce a competitive system of productive exploitation. By contrast, the British capitalist model sought, through the introduction of wage labor, to impose a general regime of biopolitical discipline. A whole nexus of laws took shape—enforced through the police, the courts, taxation, and central administration—while racial classifications and controls over the movement of black labor power (passes, mobility restrictions, penal sanctions) were implemented in order to secure a cheap, available, and controllable workforce. More specifically, the abolition of slavery by the British Empire was accompanied by a transitional system of "apprenticeship" (1834–1838), which kept formerly enslaved people tied to the same labor, as well as by the Masters and Servants Act (1841), which criminalized breaches of the "free" labor contract in order to guarantee the availability of labor power and prevent "distortions" in the wage labor market. However, breaches of contract, absenteeism, desertion of work, and indiscipline were widespread in the aftermath of abolition, even though they were punished with imprisonment, fines, and—at least in the early years—corporal punishment.

The right to vote for all men irrespective of race, granted in 1853 under the new constitution—on the basis of a relatively low property qualification (although it excluded a large portion of the black population and, to a lesser extent, of the white population)—was a response to the gradually intensifying resistance of the recently emancipated population of formerly enslaved people of color, aimed at their incorporation. The statements of William Porter, one of the authors of the 1853 constitution, are characteristic:

> "Why should you fear the exercise of the franchise? It is a delicate matter, but it must be addressed. I do not hesitate to say that I would rather encounter the 'Hottentot' (a term used at the time to refer to the indigenous Khoekhoe) at the polls, voting for his representative, than in the wilderness with a gun on his shoulder. Is it not better to disarm them by granting them the privileges of the Constitution? If you now destroy all their hopes and tell them that they will not be able to wage their struggles constitutionally, do you not yourselves drive them to wage those struggles unconstitutionally?"

The combination of these measures constituted an institutionally racialized regime in which the equality of formal rights was subordinated to criteria of property, income, and cultural identity. Liberal modernization, in other words, had a racial core at the level of institutions. It is worth noting that the liberal regime of the Cape Colony also created space for the development of a middle class of independent black African farmers and livestock herders, who possessed voting rights and supplied the colonial towns with food and animal products. From this middle class—some of whom also gained access to education abroad—emerged the first (bourgeois) political organizations of black people in South Africa.

The political substance of the matter is that colonialism at the Cape cannot be adequately explained through "cultural" frameworks of domination. It arises from the conflict between different accumulation models over how to secure cheap, available, and disciplined labor, and how land is to be redistributed in favor of capital. The model that enabled deeper exploitation was the **state-biopolitical architecture of (early) capitalism**, in which police, taxation, and the courts are unified. Pass systems, penal labor clauses, administrative surveillance, and the gradual

transformation of the "free" labor contract into a mechanism for the coercion of labor power turn "liberal" equality of rights into criteria of property and income, producing a structurally classed and racialized exclusion. As in the capitalist metropoles, the abolition of slavery, the wage labor, private property, free trade, and political representation were accompanied by the disciplining and expansion of labor exploitation, and above all by the development of surveillance and control institutions and the expansion of the state's role in enforcing class domination with racial characteristics. Here we must locate the origins of the racialized model of population management, which played a decisive role in the development of capitalism and in the later history of South Africa. Just as in the capitalist metropoles the principles of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution—of "equality" and "freedom"—were soon stripped of their radical content in order to adapt to the reality of capitalist society, that is, a class society, so too in South Africa these principles proved entirely incompatible with the imperatives of colonial capitalist development.

### *Comparison with the Zionist Settler-Colonial Project*

In short, in the case of Dutch colonialism, we see a form of settlement that emerges from the needs of metropolitan commercial capital at an early stage of capitalist development, what is usually referred to as mercantile capitalism. There is not yet a developed working class. Production, initially largely agricultural, is carried out with imported slave labor and serves primarily the self-sufficiency of the colony. The exploitation of indigenous populations, the production of surplus value, and the extraction of natural resources only began to become a systematic objective with the advent of British rule in the mid-19th century. The generalization of the capitalist mode of production in South Africa occurs almost two centuries after the initial colonization, thereby transforming the character of the colony. In both cases, the colony functions as an extension of a state formation that exists and reproduces itself outside of and independently from it, while serving the needs of metropolitan capital. At every stage of its historical development, colonialism in South Africa forms part of a global phenomenon of colonial exploitation linked to the phases of development and consolidation of the capitalist mode of production on a global scale.

The region inhabited today by Israelis and Palestinians was a province of the Ottoman Empire and was inhabited predominantly by Arabs, mainly Muslims, as well as by significant minorities of Jews, Christians, Druze, and others.[137] Primitive accumulation had already begun from the mid to late 19th century, and the local agrarian and commercial capital (Arab and Jewish) was already exploiting the labor of the emerging (Arab and Jewish) proletariat of the region. In the Cape, land acquisition was from the outset the result of conquest through military operations and displacement, whereas in Palestine, in the early years of Jewish settlement, primitive accumulation took place through land purchases (often from absentee Levantine/Ottoman large landowners) and through the displacement of small tenant farmers who cultivated the land, which followed these transactions.

The Zionist movement, which emerged in late 19th-century Europe, was not a colonial movement in the traditional sense of the term, but a peculiar nationalist offshoot of modern antisemitism. Its aim was the creation of a "Jewish state" that would serve as a "refuge" for the Jewish population of Europe. It gained the support of sections of the Western European bourgeoisie, which

137. In the first census conducted under the British Mandate for Palestine in 1922, the population was recorded as 590,890 Muslims, 83,794 Jews, 73,024 Christians, and 7,028 Druze.

sought to rid themselves of the militant Jewish proletariat in their own countries. Mass Jewish migration to the region began in the early 20th century, in a period of expanding capitalist social relations, in which Jewish bourgeois groups had already acquired certain tracts of land and, from the late 19th century onward, were already employing some of the Jewish migrant workers of the early settlement period, alongside local Arab workers. In contrast to Dutch or British colonies, the objective was not the creation of a colony as an arm of an external state formation aimed at facilitating trade, the exploitation of natural resources, or the direct exploitation of local labor by a foreign national capital. Instead, as waves of Jewish settlement became more substantial, the dominant objective became the exclusion of Arab labor from "Judaized" lands and Jewish enterprises through a form of social-chauvinist separation, and ultimately the formation of a nationally segregated Jewish working class. The generalization of state violence and large-scale land expropriation came decades later. By contrast, in the Cape, the aim was the incorporation and exploitation of cheap labor, particularly of indigenous populations and imported slaves by colonial landowners. By the time the Israeli state was established, colonialism as a global phenomenon was already entering its historical decline.

Clearly, Jewish settlement and the subsequent formation of the Zionist state exhibit features of settler colonialism. Nevertheless, it is difficult to speak in terms of a pure or classical form of colonialism. As is well known, a strictly classical colonial formation in Palestine (non-settler, of course) was the British one, which was opposed by both the Jewish and Arab populations, each from their own position. In the case of the Jews, in political debates, the attempt to substantiate Zionism as a settler-colonial movement often relies on its connection to the Eurocentric culture of the settlers and to the way their settlement was linked to the interests of other European powers. In the postwar conjuncture, one is rather compelled to adopt the framework of "neo-colonialism" on a global scale and to connect Israeli interests with those of the United States; otherwise, at least for the post-1967 period, one must adopt the reading of a local model of colony-metropole, in which the metropole is the Israeli state and the colony consists of neighboring territories into which settlers migrate and from which Palestinians are displaced. It can be said that all these explanatory frameworks, for all the truths they illuminate, conceal just as much. In reality, the entire debate on colonialism in the region is, beyond a certain point, largely a formal question. It is indeed important to examine the specific characteristics that processes such as ethnic cleansing or genocide acquire within a colonial framework (always in light of the material capitalist relations of exploitation and accumulation). However, ethnic cleansing and genocide have occurred in many historical cases without any colonial framework being involved—though capitalist relations are certainly always implicated! The insistence on the question of colonialism in the Israel–Palestine context, from a political standpoint, primarily concerns those who seek to determine which "peoples" are "entitled" to live where and to possess what. One may legitimately ask what relation such a question has to communism and revolution. We are indifferent to the arguments of (pro-)Zionists who attempt to justify the necessity of a specifically Jewish state and who deny colonialism in order to legitimize Israeli imperialism. But we are equally unconcerned with the corresponding moralistic arguments of those who advocate the necessity of a specifically Palestinian state—often going so far as to demand the complete expulsion of the "colonizer".

### *The generalization of capitalist relations in South Africa*

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 (in Kimberley, where a single mine at one point accounted for up to 95% of global diamond production) and gold in 1886 (in the Witwatersrand) led to rapid industrialization, the incorporation of the economy into the world market, and the large-scale exploitation of black workers in the mines. At the same time, urbanization and the rising demand for agricultural products transformed the countryside through the introduction of machinery and the gradual absorption of smallholding cultivators, who were transformed into workers in large-scale agricultural enterprises.

The resistance of the indigenous population to proletarianization was met with the introduction of English-speaking migrant workers in the mines, as well as a series of laws that forced black workers and independent cultivators to leave the countryside. The earliest example was the hut tax, payable—in British currency—per hut. This compelled the indigenous population to seek employment in the mines, which were the only places where wages were paid in British currency. This trend continued with the Glen Grey Act (1894), which established individual land ownership (as opposed to communal ownership) in rural areas, while also introducing a labor tax for those without wage employment, with the aim of forcing them into capitalist production on farms, in mines, or in industry. The most significant regulation regarding land ownership, however, was the Natives Land Act of 1913, which prohibited the sale of land between white and black owners in both directions, restricting black landownership to 7% of available territory designated as "reserves." At the same time, it prohibited black people from renting and cultivating land owned by whites (a productive relation that was widespread during the semi-feudal period that preceded it), thereby forcing them to work as wage laborers on white-owned farms.

At the same time, the development of the mines also led to the introduction of the so-called **pass laws**, which later became a central pillar of apartheid policy. In 1896, the South African Republic (Transvaal Boer Republic) introduced two pass laws that prohibited Africans who were not employed in the mines from entering the Rand region (where the mines were located). In parallel, under the Mining Law of 1893, it was stipulated that no black or Asian person could prepare or detonate explosives in the mines, thereby introducing the first formal "colour bar" in employment. Similar laws were implemented in varying forms over time, always aimed at controlling the movement of black workers in order to regulate the distribution of labor power to the sectors that required it.[138]

The driving force behind these measures was the colonial economy's need for cheap labor within the broader development of capitalist production. While, during the decades from the 1830s to the 1870s, the Cape Colony was home to a thriving sphere of African agricultural production—one that coexisted and competed with white agricultural production—the expansion of capitalist relations in both the agrarian and the industrial/mining sectors made the demand for cheap labor far more important than the need for agricultural products produced by independent African producers. This led to the gradual disintegration of the pre-capitalist mode of production, which had existed alongside the capitalist one throughout the 19th century.

138. It is worth noting that these laws historically applied to the movement of male workers, and whenever attempts were made to extend them to women, they were met with mass protests, culminating in the protests of 1950.

Around agricultural production and urban industry, a **national bourgeoisie** took shape which, due to its relatively high production costs compared to the international market, tended toward protectionist policies against foreign competition and toward reliance on the domestic market. By contrast, the mines rapidly passed into the hands of **international capital**[139] oriented toward the global market, which sought to lower the price of agricultural goods domestically and promoted free trade policies. The divergent interests of national and international (mining) capital played a decisive role in South Africa's political trajectory in the following decades.[140] These interests were expressed, respectively, through the South African Party (SAP), aligned with British imperial interests, and the **National Party**, which became the traditional political representative of national (primarily agrarian) capital and articulated the anti-British sentiments of the Boers. In essence, the Boer governments, expressing the interests of national (agrarian and industrial) capital, sought to subordinate industrialization to the needs of an agrarian society, imposing high taxes on mining enterprises in order to promote development in the countryside. This brought them into direct conflict with the interests of mining capital. By contrast, the British Empire viewed South Africa's mineral resources within a broader strategic framework. The development of a global financial system based on sterling secured British hegemony and had made London the center of world trade. Control over and exploitation of South Africa's mineral wealth—which led to a doubling of the gold reserves of the Bank of England between 1890 and 1896—was of strategic importance for strengthening the pound and supporting the ever-expanding volume of international transactions in the context of intensifying global competition. This formed the background to the conflict between the British government and the Boers at the end of the 19th century, which ultimately led to the creation of a unified South African state.

### *The Boer Wars and Strike Struggles (Nation, Race, Class)*

With the Boer Wars (1880–1881 and 1899–1902), what effectively unfolded was a conflict between two settler colonial powers—the British and the Boers—for control over the mineral deposits. With the British victory, the Boer Republics were annexed and the autonomous state of the Union of South Africa was established in 1910. The indigenous population played only a limited role, despite being the demographic majority (1899: 5 million inhabitants, 1 million white). Britain prevailed through scorched-earth tactics and concentration camps; of the 28,000 Boer prisoners, over 26,000 died from starvation and disease. The length of the war exposed the vulnerability of the empire.

In these events, and in the Boers' conflicts with indigenous populations, one must locate the roots of a distinct form of white nationalism—Afrikaner nationalism—which played a decisive role in South Africa's later political history. It expressed the interests of the Boers of the interior and the Afrikaners of the Cape, among others, in opposition to British rule. In relation to black populations, the Boers behaved as *colonizers*; yet in relation to the British they saw themselves as *colonized*. Here lie the ideological roots of the National Party (the party that introduced apartheid in 1948), the party of the Afrikaners, drawing its social base from farmers (Boers), as well

139. The founding of De Beers in 1888 by the British businessman Cecil Rhodes, which went on to control over 80% of global diamond production, and of Anglo American plc in 1917 by Ernest Oppenheimer, which initially operated in gold mining.

140. See Davies, R., Kaplan, D., Morris, M. & O'Meara, D., "Class Struggle and the Periodisation of the State in South Africa" (1976).

as petty-bourgeois and working-class strata (Afrikaners), but not the British. It combined an anti-British anti-imperialism with a very real racism toward black populations.[141]

A key question arises here: after its victory, why did the British Empire choose to create an autonomous state (the Union of South Africa) rather than maintain the region as a colony? The answer is multifaceted. The Afrikaner populations were strong in rural areas, politically organized in nationalist movements, and demanding autonomy. Economically, the formation of a strong state capable of rising above the particular interests of national capital (organized around industry and agricultural production) and international capital (in the mining sector), and of serving capitalist accumulation as a whole, required a "reconciliation" between the British and the Boers. For this reason, securing Boer cooperation and political incorporation required significant concessions to the defeated—but still useful for disciplining the black proletariat—Afrikaner nationalism. Indeed, the British Empire's military victory over the Boers secured mining capital's control over the mineral deposits, removing the obstacles that Boer governments had posed to capitalist accumulation. A solution was thus adopted that ensured Afrikaner cooperation in managing the black working class, while preserving the economic influence of international capital, in exchange for a degree of self-government. Thus, the first Prime Minister of the new state (the Union of South Africa) was Louis Botha, a Boer general during the war.

The discovery of mineral deposits, then, in the late 19th century marked the transition of the region from a mosaic of semi-autonomous states into a unified industrial capitalist state, with a productive model heavily reliant on **ground rent** (the exploitation of mineral resources) and on securing a reservoir of extremely **cheap labor power**. This made the formation highly sensitive to fluctuations in the price of gold and to the economic crises of the interwar period. A large number of low-wage black migrant workers were employed in the mines. Alongside them worked a smaller number (1:9) of white workers, paid relatively high wages, mainly in supervisory and inspection roles, often combined with more directly productive tasks such as machine repair and maintenance. Divisions within the labor force have always been a central strategic objective of capital. However, the higher wages of white workers became a key target for mining companies whenever they needed to reduce production costs, since black workers' wages were already close to subsistence levels.

Far from remaining passive in the face of oppression and exploitation, the black population repeatedly came into confrontation either with those seeking to dispossess them or with their employers in the mines. Between 1919 and 1921, strike movements and mass uprisings of black proletarians took place, demanding wage increases and a reduction in the cost of living. The tragedy of the situation is that, during this period, mass struggles by black strikers in the mines and in smaller sectors were crushed by white employers, either through the use of white strikebreakers

Here, some parallels can perhaps be drawn with the situation of the first Jewish migrants, but it must be stressed once again that, unlike the Dutch-speaking settlers, Jewish settlers were from the outset predominantly workers. In the case of South Africa, however, by the early twentieth century a substantial white working class had also emerged, both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking, whose struggles remained systematically separated from the black proletariat, and at times even opposed to it. Another important difference was that white and black workers often coexisted within the same workplaces in South Africa, although in differentiated roles: white workers were typically skilled labourers and foremen, and as a rule received higher wages. The most interesting point of intersection between the two local histories is how the labour and trade-union struggles of whites/Jews and blacks/Palestinians (alongside parallel military and guerrilla conflicts with British colonial rule), insofar as they remained segregated along racial/ethnic lines, contributed to the consolidation of two distinct nationalisms, each with its own ambitious claims to political representation and hegemony.

or through the complete isolation of these struggles, as white workers largely ignored them. black workers adopted a similar stance during the mass uprising of white workers in the Rand in 1922, as well as during earlier "white" strike waves in 1907, 1913, and 1914. It is characteristic that black and white workers encountered one another only at the workplace; they lived in segregated housing complexes and were excluded from major white trade unions, and therefore formed their own organizations. At the same time, it is important to note the presence of radical unions aligned with the international current of revolutionary syndicalism, with socialist and anarchist influences, emphasizing common organization at the level of the workplace rather than by craft or occupation. Such organizations included the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW(SA)), active until 1912, and later the International Socialist League (ISL), as well as other predominantly black unions such as the Industrial Workers of Africa.

When the price of gold fell on the international market in the early 1920s, capital was forced to **choose between preserving the privileges of white workers and maintaining profits**. Their choice demonstrated that the production of surplus value remains capital's primary priority, and that when racial discrimination no longer serves this purpose, capital does not hesitate to cross the racial line and treat white workers as what they are: proletarians. The companies' attempt to lay off 2,000 white workers was met with the 1922 strike,[142] also known as the "Rand Revolt," which escalated into an armed confrontation with the state. This conflict placed the dominance of international mining capital under strain, as it lost both the support of national capital (from above) and the support of the white working class (from below). Politically, this was expressed in the election of the National Party, which governed in coalition with the Labour Party[143] between 1924 and 1933, a period known as the "pact period"—a coalition between socialist and Afrikaner nationalist forces that converged around anti-British anti-imperialism and the exclusion of black populations.

The pact government pursued a dual strategy. Its aim was not to disrupt the production of surplus value in the mines, but to appropriate part of that surplus value in order to support national and agrarian capital. It therefore followed a policy of protectionism and of financing agricultural production through high taxation on mining capital. This was a bitter pill for mining capital, but one it was willing to swallow in order to overcome the threat of renewed unrest, which, despite its suppression, remained a real and persistent danger. In particular, the significant increase in the number of poor and unemployed white proletarians, concentrated around the urban centers, was seen as a major threat to social stability. There are numerous recorded statements in parliamentary debates and committee hearings expressing concern that these strata were being "corrupted and demoralized through contact with non-Europeans," and it was considered likely that in the future they might support militant struggles by white—or even black—workers.

142. The Communist Party of South Africa (a predominantly white organisation) supported the strike only hesitantly. During the demonstrations, banners were carried reading: "Workers of the world, unite and fight for a White South Africa." The army killed 230 workers, thousands were arrested, and many were hanged. The laws passed in the following years to exclude black workers from skilled positions did not, in practice, significantly improve the conditions of white workers. Instead, they sealed the defeat of the working class through the deepening of its internal division.

143. A socialist reformist party that combined the programme of classical social democracy with white supremacy. Its cadres and leadership were mainly petty-bourgeois, including former employers, supervisors, and military personnel. It supported participation in the First World War, opposed the 1922 strike and uprising during the strike movement, and, once in government, backed the system of racial segregation. Its influence within white workers' unions provided the coalition government with a strong base of support within the white working class.

Indeed, the crucial issue for the new government was the re-legitimation of the state, the incorporation of the white working class, and the avoidance of what was the worst nightmare of capitalists in South Africa at the time: the possibility of unity between white and black proletarians. However, this incorporation was not achieved through wage concessions to white mine workers (which would, on the one hand, have threatened the profit rate of mining capital and, on the other, have triggered a generalized rise in wages across all sectors). Throughout this period, the wages of white workers remained below their pre-1922 levels. The method adopted to incorporate the white working class consisted of the "protection" of white jobs through the introduction of racial criteria[144] in hiring, the encouragement of employers to hire white workers through a range of tax incentives, and the absorption of a large number of white workers into the public sector. This assimilation of the white working class was possible precisely because the 1922 uprising itself demanded the preservation of racial criteria in employment. This is where the decisive significance of the 1922 revolt lies: it marked the strategic choice by the capitalist state to maintain and deepen the division between white and black proletarians, thereby securing, for a time, control over the working class *as a whole* through the incorporation of o*ne of its segments*. From the standpoint of the working class, it marked the catastrophic failure to overcome these divisions in the early stages of the development of the labor movement in South Africa. **Apartheid can be seen as the legacy of this failure.**

A key issue that emerges is that the existence of workers as mere labor power **is not**, in itself, a sufficient condition for the formation of a unifying class consciousness and practice that transcends national boundaries and deconstructs the category of race. From an objective standpoint, for such a consciousness—and, more fundamentally, for corresponding unifying struggles—to develop, both conjunctural and structural factors must converge in such a way that groups of workers aligned with the vision of communist or anarchist internationalism, and engaged in struggle, are able to gain a deep foothold within the (broader) working class. Shifting our "point of reference" however, and placing the emphasis of our analysis to human intentions themselves, as they combine in collective forms of struggle, the subjective political factor becomes decisive—provided one recognizes that within the organization of the working class as such, through its struggles, there exists a totalizing and revolutionary *potential*. Here, the use of the concept of *potentiality* (or *tendency*) plays a pivotal role, and we can accept the criticism that, insofar as it contains a probabilistic element, it in fact takes us out of the sphere of pure "science," that is, it shifts us from the realm of contemplation to the realm of politics—as we in fact intend—precisely because our political choices always rest, to some extent, on an element of probability, ideally not of arbitrariness.

In many respects, this combined—or dialectical, one might say—shift in perspective between the objective and the subjective standpoint, as two aspects of the same reality, allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced reading of history. And insofar as we are concerned with our position in the present, we must extend this methodological approach as far as possible to any

144. The Mines and Works Act of 1926 formally crystallized the already existing division of labour between white and black workers through the introduction of racial criteria (the so-called colour bar), which excluded black workers from skilled positions. At the same time, laws such as the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 excluded black workers from participation in recognised trade unions (which were open only to white, "coloured," and "Indian" workers). By providing white workers with an institutional channel of negotiation from which black workers were excluded, a differentiated relationship between the two groups and the state was thus created. To the extent that white workers' demands remained within institutional frameworks, it became extremely difficult for the struggles of the two groups to converge.

given contemporary conjuncture. A purely objectivist view of history would distance us from the often unpredictable role played by each specific working-class political formation, as well as by various bourgeois institutions, in shaping historical developments. Even worse, a "pessimistic" objectivist reading that sees the working class as inherently immersed in racism and nationalism cannot adequately account for historical moments in which workers' struggles converged across racial lines. For example, one case of major significance for understanding the phenomenon of racism is the cooperation between white and black slaves and indentured laborers in rural struggles in Virginia during the first forty years of its colonization, culminating in Bacon's Rebellion of 1676–77. The independent historian Ted Allen,[145] in his socio-economic analysis, has argued in detail, that it is not racism that produces slavery; rather, slavery produces racism. The need to impose slavery as an effective relation of domination and exploitation for the extraction of surplus product encountered precisely these joint struggles of blacks and whites. Allen argues that racism, as a dominant ideology in North America, was produced retroactively through the racist laws imposed by the state against the proletariat, as a way for capital to "save the situation" for itself by consolidating slavery. He further argues that this racial order ultimately harmed not only the black, but also the numerically significant white working class. Here, then, simplistic schemas "racism produced from below" do not suffice. What we see instead is that *racism is produced through class struggle itself*—that is, through a process of conflict, action and counteraction—and specifically through the *ways in which this struggle is mediated by various working-class and bourgeois institutions.*

## *The Driving Force Behind Apartheid*

Apartheid cannot be understood as a simple intensification of segregation, nor can it be reduced to the racist ideology of the National Party. First, this ideology has historical roots embedded in the very development of capitalist relations in South Africa. Second, as we have seen, the hegemony of mining capital entered into crisis due to (a) exogenous factors (such as the rise in the price of gold), which sharpened the competition between national and international capital, and (b) the internal resistance of white workers to capital's offensive. The racist ideology of the National Party and its promotion of segregation was a political strategy aimed at the incorporation of white workers, with the purpose of legitimizing capitalist domination, this time under the hegemonic leadership of national capital.

We will attempt to shed light on one aspect concerning the reasons and conditions under which the management of the proletariat took the specific form of apartheid. This has to do with the political economy of South Africa, and in particular with the role of the "reserves" within the social formation.

South Africa's path to industrialization from the 1870s onward was characterized by a system of *cheap migrant labor*, which developed during a period (up to the 1930s) in which the main productive sectors of the economy were agriculture and mining. We can, broadly speaking, say that three distinct modes of production coexisted side by side in South Africa during this period: First, a pre-capitalist mode of production structured around the traditional economy of African communities, characterized by communal land ownership and cultivation in the reserves. Second, a semi-feudal mode of production organized around the farms of white landowners, who exploited African labor through various coercive labor regimes and dependency—such as

145. Theodore W. Allen, The Invention of the White Race, Verso, 2012.

land tenancy and debt peonage—remnants of the earlier slave-owning period. Finally, a dominant capitalist mode of production structured around the mines and ports, which expanded continuously (under both international and national capital) and progressively penetrated and constrained the other two. The traditional redistributive economy of the reserves[146] functioned as the main system of social reproduction for a very large part of the black population, who worked intermittently in the mines and returned to the reserves, where they retained access to certain means of production as members of the community. The high rate of profit of mining capital was based precisely on the existence of the pre-capitalist mode of production in the reserves, which covered a significant portion of the cost of reproduction of black labor power (including childcare, care for the elderly and the sick, and the early education of children), thereby allowing employers to pay black workers wages below their full cost of reproduction.

However, from the 1930s onward, and especially after the Second World War, the production of consumer goods in urban centers began to develop. The war, in particular, marked a rapid expansion of industrial capital, supported by the state. Indicatively, its contribution to GDP increased by 90% between 1939 and 1945. This generated a sharp rise in demand for cheap labor in industrial centers and led to the mass migration of black workers from rural areas to the cities. This had several consequences: a) the gradual disintegration of the pre-capitalist mode of production in the reserves, as black workers permanently left the countryside and settled in urban areas,[147] where they and their families became fully dependent on wages for survival; b) the resulting crisis of the system of cheap migrant labor on which capitalist accumulation had previously relied; c) a problem of control and disciplining of the working class, now concentrated in large numbers in urban centers; and d) a threat to the system of incorporation of white labor, as wages came under renewed pressure due to the presence of black workers. The latter was reinforced by the fact that 225,000 white workers were compelled to enter the military and participate in the North African campaigns alongside the British Empire, being replaced by black workers in the rear. This also strengthened Afrikaner anti-British and anti-imperialist sentiments, boosting the electoral support of the anti-British National Party against the pro-British United Party, which had led the country into the war.

While the segregation measures of the period 1870–1930—restrictions on access to urban areas, pass laws, the territorial segregation of land ownership (see the Native Land Act of 1913, which prohibited black people from purchasing land outside the reserves), together with various forms of forced labor—constituted a system of reproduction developed in the early period of capitalism based on ground rent (agricultural production and mining), apartheid was the specific model implemented in South Africa in order to adapt this system to the era of industrial capital and to preserve a high rate of exploitation in a context where the pre-capitalist mode of production in the reserves was in decline. It was an attempt to preserve the reproductive role of the reserves, to secure a steady supply of cheap, flexible labor for the new industries, to ensure the disciplining of black labor power through an extensive and repressive apparatus of control, and finally to maintain the racist ideal of "white cities," which was under threat by the growing concentration of poor black workers within them. In this sense, it can be understood as an attempt to extend

146. We are dealing with an economy in which, partly due to competition from capitalist agricultural enterprises, there was not sufficient surplus produced to be brought to the market. Land belonged to the community, its cultivation was organised primarily on the basis of the (extended) family, and the product was not distributed through exchange but according to certain communal rules of allocation.

147. The process of disintegration is clearly also related to other factors, such as the gradual penetration of commodity production and monetary exchange into traditional communities.

the structure of the mining economy to industry and the cities: the denial of land rights in urban areas, the confinement of black populations to specially constructed, segregated zones under tight control (townships), directly echoes the organization of mining compounds.

What we are describing here is, in essence, a crisis of reproduction of capitalist relations, which was accompanied by struggles both in the cities and in the countryside, with demands that increasingly began to call into question the structure of society as a whole. The concentration of black workers in urban areas and their newly enhanced bargaining position found expression in a series of increasingly militant struggles, culminating in the major strike of 100,000—mostly black—mine workers in 1946. Indicatively, between 1940 and 1949, 685,000 working hours were lost due to strikes, compared to 170,000 in the previous decade. Apartheid thus emerged as a state **response** to this conjuncture.

### *What was apartheid?*

With the rise of the National Party to power in 1948, a complex legal system was established which, building on existing social, political, and economic forms of discrimination, extended them and gave them a permanent institutional character. The population was divided into four strictly defined "racial" categories: white, coloured, indian, and black (Population Registration Act of 1950), and interracial marriage and sexual relations between whites and "non-Europeans" were prohibited. All those who did not fall into the category of "white" were reduced to second-class citizens, without political rights or the right to vote.[148] The right to land ownership, as we have seen, had already been removed in 1913.

In rural areas, separate zones were designated (reserves/bantustans) which were presented as corresponding to the traditional territories of indigenous communities (Group Areas Act of 1950). In reality, these were large, isolated tracts of infertile land, into which hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly relocated, with the aim of breaking their forms of organization, compelling them to work for starvation wages, and removing from the cities where the presence of a large mass of poor, unemployed black people was seen as a threat to political stability.

The system of pass laws was further **expanded**, requiring all non-white workers to carry an internal pass and to present it during inspections. These laws served a dual function of exclusion and confinement: exclusion of black people from the most developed urban areas (designated as white-only), and confinement within industrial zones close to places of work, while also restricting the tendency of black workers to leave the countryside and seek employment in the cities.

The black working class was divided into categories. Those with permanent status were forcibly relocated to designated residential areas (townships) near industrial zones. Those with migrant status worked on six- or eight-month contracts and lived in hostels, while their families remained in the bantustans. This was a disciplinary arrangement designed to balance capital's need for order and security on the one hand, and for labor power on the other. Strikes were prohibited

148. The right to vote for adult men in the british Cape Colony, which had been in place since 1854 (and was extended in 1930 to white women only), was gradually restricted—first through economic criteria, namely the tripling of the income qualification (from £25 to £75 per year), which excluded a large number of black voters, as well as many poor white voters. This was followed by the restriction of the number of parliamentary seats that black voters could elect representatives for under the Representation of Natives Act 1936, and ultimately by the complete removal of voting rights in 1951 under the Separate Representation of Voters Act 1951.

for black workers (Native Labour Act of 1953), punishable by a fine of £500 or three years' imprisonment. At the same time, efforts were made to enforce racial segregation within trade unions: the formation of mixed unions of white and black workers was banned, while in already existing "mixed" unions, leadership positions were reserved exclusively for white members (Industrial Conciliation Act of 1956). Laws excluding black workers from skilled occupations were expanded and accompanied by corresponding segregation in education. In parallel, a series of laws (including the Suppression of Communism Act, the Unlawful Organisations and Sabotage Act, etc.) and policing institutions enabled the state to arrest, imprison, and deport individuals through summary procedures, violently repressing organized political activity.

The discovery of mineral deposits and the process of industrialization were based on the mass exploitation of black workers. It is characteristic that the very requirements of capitalist accumulation proved stronger than the artificial bureaucratic barriers of exclusion erected by apartheid governments. By the late 1960s, despite apartheid measures, massive concentrations of black populations had formed around urban areas, and black workers accounted for 78% of all industrial workers and 90% of all mine workers. Apartheid ensured, for several decades, one of the cheapest pools of labor power in the world for both domestic and international capital in South Africa. The economic "success" of apartheid in the following decades, and the rapid industrial expansion it enabled, produced a powerful black proletariat which, through its militancy and struggles, drove the system into deep crisis. Apartheid produced its own gravediggers.

### *The Black Nationalist Movement*

The movement that begins with the founding of the South African Native National Congress in 1912, the precursor of the ANC, framed social demands as demands of the black "nation/people" as a whole, rather than as demands of the working class. In South Africa, the movement was "nationalist" in a different sense from its counterpart in Palestine, since it did not demand the creation of a separate state. In other words, it did not take on a form of territorial separatism, as Palestinian nationalism gradually did—even though the initial program of the PLO in 1968 contained similar "one-state solution" aspirations over the entire territory of what is today Israel-Palestine, without advocating the expulsion of the Jewish population, but rather their inclusion as citizens of a new Palestinian state.

The social base of the ANC in its early phase consisted of educated petty-bourgeois and bourgeois strata with ties to the church and chiefs (the traditional aristocracy of the african people), from which the administrators of the bantustans were selected, as managers of the local black population, under apartheid. Political organizations of the black nationalist movement negotiated with the British administration, seeking institutional recognition and political rights within the existing state, while maintaining distance from more radical practices (such as the refusal to support the mass burning of pass books in the 1930s). As such, the movement hidered autonomous class struggle, replacing it with a strategy of incorporation and recognition by the state.

The South African Communist Party (SACP) on the other hand, a predominantly white organization, despite being gradually compelled to recognize the existence and importance of the black working class, never effectively supported the overcoming of racial divisions and the

common struggle of white and black workers in a revolutionary direction.[149] Instead, following the Comintern line of the period and the so-called "theory of stages", it chose to become an appendage of the ANC, supporting a bourgeois-democratic revolution that would end "colonial oppression" and establish an "independent native republic of South Africa" as a stage toward a "democracy of workers and peasants with full and equal rights for all races".[150] Both of these well-worn conceptions—that (a) a national revolution will eliminate racial divisions, and (b) that class struggle will find fertile ground in a "deracialized democratic state"—were thoroughly disproved in South Africa. These are deeply counter-revolutionary positions, which end up undermining class struggle and the revolutionary transformation of society at the most critical moments of social antagonism.

The leaders of the ANC, for their part, like many nationalists at the time from other states that occupied a subordinate position within the international division of labour, saw in the state capitalism of the USSR an appealing model of capitalist development. The success with which the Soviet party bureaucracy harnessed the dynamism of the working class in order to seize state power, as well as its subsequent suppression of the workers' movement in favour of state-capitalist development and forced industrialisation, fit neatly with the objectives of ANC leaders. On the flip side, the ANC's nationalism and the prospect of a national "democratic revolution" in South Africa—one that would prevent the working class from autonomously asserting its interests—aligned with the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, which sought to create a sphere of influence and a geopolitical bloc within the context of its imperialist rivalry with the United States. The same framework also underpinned Soviet support for Nasser and the "Free Officers' movement" in Egypt in the 1950s.

Just as the Communist Party of China had, in a similar way, chosen to enter the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), and until the very last moment supported its leaders as "allies in the national liberation struggle" within the framework of the counter-revolutionary theory of stages it adhered to, so too in South Africa the Communist Party sought to approach the ANC and secure the support of its leadership. In 1927, the same year that the nationalist leader of the KMT, Chiang Kai-shek—Comintern's "favourite child" in China—launched the purge of communists from the KMT and ordered the massacre of workers in Shanghai, thereby sealing the defeat of the 1926 Chinese revolution, in South Africa Josiah Gumede, a nationalist leader of the ANC, received the endorsement of Moscow and was elected president of the ANC, inaugurating the close collaboration between the two organizations that continued throughout the years of apartheid.

Alongside the nationalist movement, a socialist workers' movement had begun to develop from the late nineteenth century, largely due to the influence of white migrant workers from Europe who brought with them their own political traditions to South Africa. However, until the First World War, the influence of this movement among the black population was almost negligible. The first significant union of black workers in South Africa, the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU), emerged in 1919 out of the major dockworkers' strike in Cape Town, which secured a 100% wage increase. It was influenced by Marcus Garvey's ideas of Pan-Africanism and "black pride" and was based on the model of the Wobblies (IWW), owing to the influence of black sailors

149. In 1924, the Communist Party of South Africa shifted toward organising black workers. By around 1928, approximately 1,600 of its 1,750 members were black. However, even a decade later, many of the unions it controlled—such as the Distributive Workers Union—did not admit black workers.

150. Dominic Tweedie, "South African Communist Party Documents", www.marxists.org

working on ships arriving from the United States and the Caribbean, who brought with them their own radical traditions. It was a hybrid of trade union and political organization, one of the most radical in South African history, which by the 1920s had reached 100,000 members. To give a sense of the level of organization of the black working class in this (pre-war) period, it is worth noting that by 1933 there were only three black workers' unions in existence.

### *The Social movements in the 1970s and 1980s*

The 1970s in South Africa were characterized by economic stagnation, inflation, and a significant decline in real wages. After a period of political inertia and repression, a wave of mass workers' struggles broke out from 1973 onward, the most important of which was the strike at the port of Durban. The strikes soon spread to broader sectors, including manufacturing, textiles, and transport. Workers demanded substantial wage increases, ranging from 20% to 40%, in successive waves of mobilization. The organisational form of these struggles was that of wildcat strikes, without institutional mediation, with underground worker networks organizing autonomously. Their defining features were the rejection of representation by existing institutional structures, and the rapid diffusion of struggle across different sectors.

The content of these mobilizations simultaneously challenged both white employers and the black managerial class of the bantustans, which functioned as an intermediary disciplinary mechanism. Attempts by local leaders to divert the struggles by transforming the class conflict into an intra-racial confrontation—turning black workers against Indian workers—were unsuccessful. On the contrary, between 1973 and 1976 approximately 200,000 black workers took part in strikes, laying the foundations for the re-establishment of trade unions and the revival of workers' organization, albeit still on a limited scale.

It was precisely this decisive and unmediated proletarian character of these strikes that broke the apartheid regime's hitherto apparent invulnerability. The repressive-racialized management of the black proletariat, through the restriction of political rights and the prohibition of official trade unionism, was designed to ensure the postwar disciplining of the black working class. However, it had also deprived the capitalist state of two key mechanisms of incorporation and control over the working class: trade unions and nationalist organizations. When the black working class began to assert itself autonomously, even challenging the authority and mediation of the black managerial bourgeoisie—an essential component of the apartheid system—things began to turn sour for the regime.

The intensification of class struggle culminated in the Soweto uprising of 1976, which, over the four months it lasted and despite the extreme repression that followed, destabilized the everyday governance of apartheid and strengthened the self-confidence of the black working class. It began in June 1976 with a student march of approximately 15,000 pupils against the compulsory use of Afrikaans in schools, and escalated into violent clashes involving barricades and the burning of state targets, with workers joining in as they returned from factories in the afternoon. In the following days, the struggle spread to the townships around Johannesburg and other areas, taking the form of strikes, demonstrations, and street battles. Political organizations played a limited role. The ANC intervened only marginally as the uprising was coming to an end. The tendency that had the most influence at that moment was that of the Black Consciousness Movement, which emphasized black self-activity without recourse to white institutions. As a political current, it can perhaps be described best as a form of radical identity nationalism: it


*Strike demonstration by workers of the Coronation Brick Company in Durban, 1973—one of the most militant wildcat strikes of the period.*

emphasized dignity and self-organization, but by relegating class struggle to a secondary priority, it did not manage to produce a material strategy of confrontation in the workplaces and did not transcend the social boundaries of students and middle strata.

However, following the Soweto uprising of 1976, a shift in the center of gravity can be observed. The social struggles of the 1980s acquired a clearly more universal and material character. The strike wave of the 1980s emerged from the black industrial proletariat, through autonomous grassroots structures, widespread "stay-aways" (organized absences from work), and an organic link between struggles in the factories and the neighbourhoods. These struggles targeted both wage increases and the recognition of labor rights, but also the dismantling of the racialized apparatus of discipline (pass laws, black administrators of the bantustans, municipal councils in the townships)—that is, both capitalist exploitation and its specifically racialized form. The radicalism of the social movement was expressed as a tendency toward overcoming mediation, the diffusion of demands beyond the wage relation into the sphere of social reproduction, and the potential for class unification from below.

The scale of the strike movement was such that between 1986 and 1990 more working hours were lost to strikes than in the previous 75 years combined. The labor federations (FOSATU in 1979 and COSATU in 1985) formally promoted, at least in theory, the principle of non-racial organization, which in practice was constrained both by apartheid legislation and by the established practice of white workers organizing separately. Unified shop-floor committees, joint demands lists, and collective bargaining agreements covering all workers in a given sector emerged as strategic objectives of the movement, and could at the very least begin to undermine divisions within the black working class. Strike committees for rent reductions, cheaper bus fares, and education sprang up everywhere. The government was forced to grant a limited form of local self-administration in the townships through the Black Local Authorities Act (1983), in a last-ditch attempt to regain control and restore governability. However, municipal councillors were widely seen as government puppets and became targets of the insurgent movement. Many were killed and their homes burned down, along with numerous government buildings. Finding new candidates for these positions became increasingly difficult for the government. The townships became effectively ungovernable. The apartheid regime was in crisis, and the repressive management of the proletariat **had reached its limits**.

The state was confronted with an increasingly politicized, undisciplined, and combative black working class, which was organizing autonomously at the grassroots level. Independent, informal unions organized strikes without any control from formal organizations and outside any institutional framework. In the factories, the bosses had begun hiring black workers for skilled positions and were increasingly concerned about the growing militancy of workers and the activity of informal unions. Soon, the government was forced to change course and, for the first time, recognize black trade unions, abandoning a core component of apartheid's system of labor organization (see the Wiehahn Commission Report, which led to the Industrial Conciliation Amendment Act of 1979). The objective was clearly to reintegrate union activity into an institutional framework and bring unions under control. However, legal recognition significantly boosted black workers' organization. The entry of black workers into the field of collective bargaining placed pressure on the existing labor regime, leading to improvements in working conditions, which, to some extent, benefited white workers as well. These gains were more indirect and gradual and came mostly through the improvement of the overall framework of labor relations. The organizational experience of black workers spread and enriched the repertoire of struggle of the white working class as well, which—having historically functioned as a pillar of the racial order—saw part of its relatively privileged position threatened by reforms. In the short term, it adopted a defensive stance, as the exclusivity of certain occupational categories and preferential wage structures gradually eroded. However, the expansion of collective bargaining exerted an overall upward pressure on wages across the working class, both black and white, while pressure for cheaper transport, lower rents, and universal (regardless of race, income, or land status) access to basic goods also raised the social wage more broadly.

The content of social struggles in Palestine differed radically in terms of the possibility of overcoming racial or ethnic divisions. The militarization of the Palestinian struggles—particularly after the end of the First Intifada—strengthened the symbolic hegemony of armed organizations, resulting in a consolidation around questions of national sovereignty and identity, which made it more difficult to articulate unifying social demands. By contrast, in South Africa, the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s were primarily of a class character: they were struggles for wages, for collective bargaining agreements, and for social goods, with demands that potentially concerned the entire working class, regardless of race, even though the regime legally obstructed unified organization. The absence of military organizations at the core of mass mobilizations allowed the struggle to remain a field of autonomous class confrontation, without the political and organizational monopolization of struggle by armed intermediaries—a factor that decisively contributed to its unifying character.

### *From insurrection to negotiations*

The wave of repression following Soweto forced many young people to flee to neighboring African countries. There, they came into contact with the ANC, which had established strong structures since the time of its ban in South Africa, and offered them refuge in reception centers. In this way, the ANC politically capitalized on the Soweto uprising, despite its absence from the events at the time. Between its banning in South Africa in 1960 (after the Sharpeville Massacre) and its assumption of power in 1994, the ANC underwent a profound transformation in terms of organization and political culture. Under the guidance of the SACP, it went through a process of militarization and assumed a managerial role over a refugee population of 12,000 people—a role that, in many ways, prepared it for the eventual takeover of state power in the '90s. Indeed, during these decades, it controlled extensive areas in Tanzania, Angola, and Zambia, with its own

schools, hospitals, factories, and farms. It also had its own police force, nicknamed Mbokodo[151] (a Xhosa word that means "the boulder that crushes" [grain]), its own prisons, and its own army in the form of the organization "Umkhonto we Sizwe" ("Spear of the Nation" or "MK"), established as the armed wing of the nationalist movement, supposedly to conduct sabotage and guerrilla operations in South Africa. In reality, its activity until the 1980s was almost nonexistent. The **limited role of "armed struggle"** marked a clear difference from the Palestine-Israel case. The ANC-SACP had neither the intention nor the illusion that it could overthrow the apartheid government through militarized means. However, the real utility of the armed section[152]—imposing military discipline within the organization and using it to control the population after coming to power—shows a point of similarity with the PLO.

At this point it is useful to return to a crucial observation by E. Minassian[153]: *"the first Intifada started as a revolt of the proletarians of the occupied territories [...] this revolt was "recuperated" only later, by the PLO, to turn it into a national political movement. What happened next? According to the "classical" model, once the political leadership takes over the state, the interests of the social movement and the political formation start to diverge, and the proles are sent back to work by the newly formed nation state, supposedly for the benefits of the masses."* And this is exactly what happened in South Africa, when the ANC came to power. Despite the apparently divergent political trajectories— "democratization" and "de-racialization" of the state in South Africa and continued displacement, expropriation and segregation in Palestine-Israel—there is convergence at the level of social relations. In the case of Palestine, Minassian observes that *"this delinking took place before independence was achieved"*. In other words, the leadership of the so-called "national liberation" movement has already turned against the proletariat, in collaboration with Israeli capital, as discussed in chapter 3. But what about South Africa? In the next section we will look at the reality behind the myth of the "New South Africa", that is, the reality of *neoliberal apartheid.*

## *The neoliberal restructuring of capitalist relations*

After 1994, South Africa emerged from the apartheid regime and entered a new political phase with the ANC in power. The end of apartheid formally freed black South Africans from white domination and granted them legal equality, political rights, and the vote within the framework of a de-racialized bourgeois democratic state. However, if we look beyond the narrative of a "successful anti-colonial struggle," we find that instead of emancipation, the black proletariat found itself trapped in a more violent version of the same class domination, with political equality functioning as a veneer for the intensification of exploitation, following the victory of bourgeois-democratic forces and the far-reaching concessions made to capital.

In the decades leading up to 1994, the demands of social movements against apartheid for land and control over the basic means of production were also at the core of the ANC's program. In the **Freedom Charter of 1955,** the ANC-SACP declared that "the land shall belong to those who work it" and that "the wealth of the country, its mines, banks, and monopolies shall be transferred to the people as a whole," In other words, it advocated a form of nationalisation within the framework of the "two-stage theory", which posited first the establishment of a non-racial democratic state,

151. Stephen Ellis, "Mbokodo: Security in ANC camps, 1961-1990", libcom.org.

152. Even after its legalization, the African National Congress continued to send members of uMkhonto we Sizwe to military academies in Russia and India.

153. See Appendix I

and only subsequently a transition toward socialism. The "second stage" of socialism never came. The initial promises of redistribution and nationalization were transformed into a neoliberal transition that not only left capitalist power intact but deepened class antagonisms. The two-stage strategy ultimately led to the consolidation of a capitalist state after 1994, leaving the essence of class domination untouched—as was to be expected. Neville Alexander, one of the sharpest voices of the left in South Africa, offered a scathing critique of both the ANC and the two-stage theory, pointing out that political equality did not resolve social exploitation: "we won the vote, yes, but the vote does not bring food on the table". However, despite his radical class-oriented perspective, he remained trapped in a form of left-wing nationalism, in which national liberation continued to be posed as a necessary precondition for social emancipation. His critique, however sharp, did not transcend the framework of the nation and continued to view social emancipation through the completion of the national project. The issue, in South Africa as elsewhere, is that as long as liberation is defined through the nation, social emancipation is buried, and the state remains as a form of reproduction of capital.

The case of Palestine regarding the issue of land reclamation differs in that the dominance of the petty-bourgeois and nationalist leadership led to an orientation in which the "liberation of the land" was framed from the outset exclusively in terms of state independence. The PLO Charter of 1968 proclaimed the return of all refugees and the restoration of Palestinian sovereignty over the entirety of historical Palestine, without in any way including a concrete economic programme of redistribution or the socialisation of the means of production. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, socio-economic demands were primarily expressed through the organization of workers and peasants in the occupied territories, with demands concerning employment, wages, and access to resources. After the Oslo Accords (1993), the establishment of the Palestinian Authority institutionalized a form of self-governance that incorporated the management of poverty and aid through international donors and NGOs. This marks an important difference in terms of the objectives of the political-military organisations themselves: in South Africa, the declarations set a dual goal (political and social), but only the political goal was realized; whereas in Palestine, the declarations set a national goal (independence, return, statehood), with vague or nonexistent references to social emancipation.

As in the case of the Palestinian Authority, the newly established South African republic was set up under the supervision of international financial institutions (the World Bank and the IMF) — which promoted policies of a "mixed economy," fiscal discipline, and integration — as a "de-racialized" bourgeois state, without, however, challenging the core of the capitalist structure. The IMF's "mixed economy" in practice meant that the state retained a role in guaranteeing market stability and debt repayment, while social spending was reduced to a minimum, limited to programs addressing extreme poverty–many of which were implemented through NGOs and international donors. The "mixed economy" thus meant a state in the service of capital profitability.

The GEAR program (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) entailed trade liberalization, privatization of public services, tariff reductions, and the attraction of foreign investment. Within this framework, electricity and water services were transformed into extremely expensive commodities: residents of the townships faced mass service cut-offs when they were unable to pay, while private security companies became a de facto governing presence. Cities were divided into zones, with wealthy suburbs fenced off and repression in the poor neighborhoods.

The essence of this "neoliberal apartheid" is that formal political equality did not abolish segregation—it merely restructured it. On one hand, a black elite emerged through Black Economic Empowerment, acquiring shares in large companies and joining the bourgeoisie alongside the white elite. On the other hand, the majority of the black population remained trapped in unemployment (25–35% overall, up to 60% in some areas), poverty (50% below the poverty line, a higher rate than during apartheid!), confined in shanty towns and overexploited. As for land redistribution, it never really happened—only 7.5% of land has passed to black owners. Even this limited transfer of land, was of course far from any radical agrarian reform that gave land to landless workers or poor farmers. Instead, land transfers occurred through the "willing seller – willing buyer" program, in which the state purchased land from white landowners at market prices and sold or granted it to members of the emerging black middle and upper class—entrepreneurs, professionals, capitalists—while the rural poor and landless remained excluded, since no free redistribution or collectivisation of land took place. Thus, redistribution functioned as a policy of stratification: it produced a new class of black owners/entrepreneurs that joined the elite and legitimized the regime, without changing the material conditions of the poor peasantry or the black proletariat. The vast mass of poor blacks were treated as "surplus" populations, managed by the state through surveillance, repression, and securitization, with small private armies of security companies keeping urban zones separated—how far, really, is this from the apartheid regime?

TThe apartheid pass system was abolished and formal freedom of movement was established, but in practice the townships did not disappear; they remained as impoverished urban areas, which after 1994 acquired new characteristics of ghettoization. While formal legal exclusions have been abolished, economic barriers (poverty, unemployment, housing costs) and spatial planning have kept the population in the same areas. Cities have been reorganized with "gated communities" for the middle and upper classes (both black and white), while the poor remain concentrated in zones of exclusion. Black people are no longer legally prevented from entering the cities, but socioeconomic conditions (unemployment, transport costs, police surveillance) prevent them from leaving the townships. Segregation has thus shifted from legally institutionalised racial separation to class-produced spatial division, albeit one that retains a strong racial character, since it is the black proletariat that remains trapped in conditions of marginalisation.

A patronage-based, clientelist state was built within the new framework. ANC officials exploited state mechanisms and contracts to accumulate wealth, acquiring companies through government contracts and loans (take for example Patrice Motsepe, who in 2024 was named by CNBC Africa as the 9th richest person in Africa and the 3rd richest in South Africa, or the Zuma family), while politicians and former union leaders found themselves on corporate boards and executive positions. A prime example of this process is Cyril Ramaphosa, a former trade unionist who in the 1980s had led the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in one of the largest strikes in South African history, playing an important role in the anti-apartheid movement. Ramaphosa acquired stakes in almost all major sectors—from telecommunications and media to beverages and fast food (he owned the South African franchise of the American McDonald's chain) and mining (Lonmin, among others). By 2015 he had become one of the richest politicians in South Africa, with a fortune of around $450 million (340 million pounds), and today he serves as President of South Africa, since 2018. Corruption became a defining feature of the new regime, with state–capital relations fueling the enrichment of a minority. The major trade union federations, such as COSATU and NUM, became institutions of collaboration with capital, managing investment funds and providing high salaries for their executives.

The structural crisis of integration and social reproduction—which is not merely a political or moral failure, but a result of the class function of the state and institutions after apartheid—has been accompanied by a turn toward security and repression. Private security has expanded massively, employing hundreds of thousands of people, while the police reinforced their presence in poor neighborhoods. Poverty has been increasingly criminalised, and labor mobilizations were met with violence and repression. The climax of this trajectory was the Marikana massacre in 2012. Three thousand workers at the mining company Lonmin went on strike demanding a basic wage of 12,500 rand, in a strike organized outside the corrupt and capital-connected official trade union structures. In response, the police—acting under the authority of the democratic post-colonial regime—attacked and killed 34 workers, injuring dozens more. Despite the killings, the strike spread and forced Lonmin to grant wage increases of 11–22%. Marikana became a turning point, starkly revealing the conflict between capital, the state, and the workers, who faced the former "liberators" of the ANC (and members of Umkhonto we Sizwe), this time as executioners: Jacob Zuma as President of the government and Cyril Ramaphosa as a board member and major shareholder of Lonmin, who actively called for police intervention against the striking workers.

The Marikana strike was more than a fight over wages; it was a direct challenge to the neoliberal regime established after 1994. The massacre revealed a stark reality: the promise of "liberation" from white rule is entirely compatible with neoliberal exploitation. In fact, it was the most lethal incident of state repression since the Soweto uprising of 1976! The post-apartheid state was prepared to kill to protect the interests of the mines.

If in South Africa the transition of 1994 brought formal political equality alongside the country's integration into the neoliberal global order, in Israel-Palestine the Oslo Accords produced a regime of partial incorporation into the state of Israel and integration the global market through the Palestinian Authority marked by neoliberal development via NGOs and international investment, and ongoing military surveillance and enclosure. In the West Bank a logic of population management took hold, combining networks of control and market mechanisms, while in Gaza, the strategy of confinement and blockade prevailed.

The fluidity of neoliberal apartheid means that older, rigid forms of segregation no longer operate in a direct, legally codified manner, but are instead transformed into more flexible and indirect inequalities. Discrimination is shifted from the state to the functioning of the free market and competition. Black elites also participate in the domination of capital. Racism continues to exist—not legally institutionalized, but operating silently through mechanisms of exclusion that appear "neutral." Thus, race does not disappear as a factor of inequality; it merely changes its form and modes of management. In any case, the neoliberal phase of apartheid represents a political restructuring in which capital is strengthened and working-class layers are plunged into insecurity.

In this edition, we choose to focus on October 7 not as a "terrorist act," nor as an "act of resistance" by the Palestinian guerrillas, but primarily as a militarized externalization of the class conflicts that permeate the societies of both warring sides. Our goal was to understand how we got to October 7, viewing it as a culmination of historical events which, in order to be understood, require a narrative that goes back in time and deals with the internal contradictions of Israeli/Palestinian society and not simply imperialist conflicts. One issue that particularly concerned us is the triumph of politico-military formations—detached from social struggles—over class struggle: on the one hand, the military wing of Hamas and, on the other, the Israeli military forces, together create a nationalist bounded field, a restrictive cordon around the working classes, which they try to influence and keep on the sidelines. This publication brings the historical context and the centrality of class struggle back to the forefront. Hence our choice to turn our gaze inward and look inside the societies of Gaza and the West Bank, but also Israel.