

RED

bulletin of the Communist Left

#99 November 2012

War between Israel and Gaza.

There have been military interchanges between the Israeli state and the Hamas led government of Gaza going on for years. Now there is full blooded war. Israel has intensified bombing raids over Gaza and has called up 70,000 conscripts with the aim of a land invasion. Hamas missiles have landed near Tel Aviv and the Israelis have blown up the Hamas headquarters. Lives have been lost and many buildings blown up, especially in Gaza. Hamas are outgunned by a ruthless Israeli war machine.

It is in no way a surprise that war has broken out. Israel has effectively divided the Palestinian people between those on the West Bank, led by the PFLP, now more passive and those on the Gaza strip, led by Hamas. Gaza has been described as the world's largest prison camp.

Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas on the planet. Apart from overcrowding, the Gazan people have been forced to endure a blockade, not just of military supplies but basic amenities such as medicines.

This blockade has been enforced not just by Israel, but by the Mubarak regime of Egypt. In Egypt, Mubarak has been overthrown. The Muslim Brotherhood have formed a government. They have promised to lift the blockade. But they have also promised to honour all agreements concerning international relations signed by Mubarak. Their president Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood now

claims to be backing the Gazan uprising. We will see if this support is backed by meaningful action. For us the issue is not of who started the conflict and who is technically the aggressor. The whole state of Israel is an act of aggression against the Palestinian people. For decades they have even denied that the Palestinians are a nation. They have ruthlessly extended their territory on the West Bank, robbing Palestinians of their communities. They reserve the right to invade their neighbouring countries with impunity. For example, when Hezbollah captured a couple of Israeli soldiers, Israel invaded and devastated the whole of Lebanon. Predictably, US and Israel are blaming Hamas and Turkey and Egypt are blaming Israel. We are on the side of the Palestinians, irrespective of who started this war.

Hamas are currently opposing peace talks on the grounds there is no guarantee that any agreement could be enforced. In fact Israel will rip up any agreement and when it breaches, both the USA and the UN will do nothing. Verbal criticism is the best they offer. Israel kills and bombs with impunity.

International workers solidarity is what is needed to beat the isolation of the Palestinian people. Australian workers solidarity is required now!

CONTENTS

Obama re-elected president of the USA
Europe General strike against poverty
Trotskyist Platform and Syria.
Refugees hunger strike on Nauru
Socialist Alternative and RSP, an opportunist lashup
Gough Whitlam 40 years after "It's Time"

Obama re-elected. President of the USA

In terms of meeting his objectives, on the whole Obama has been a failure. The fact that he has been re-elected with a much reduced majority is a reflection of the failings of the Republicans as opposed to success of his own policies.

Whilst many are relieved that a right wing alternative Mitt Romney lost, somewhat dampened is the mood for change. Obama himself is promising to bridge the divide and unite all Americans “who have more in common than red and blue”

The initial election of Barak Obama as President of the United States, four years ago, showed the total bankruptcy of the US imperialist elite. They realised that George Bush gung-ho military attacks had put America offside with Middle East and Third World nations. They also realised that hard line economic rationalism plus an out of touch establishment alienated Americas own people especially Hispanics and Black Americans. Obama was a last ditch effort so those minorities and others alienated wouldn't lose faith and go further to the left. .

The right wing economic rationalist establishment had been totally exposed by the Global financial Crisis. The theory was that if capitalists were left to themselves, without economic regulation, the market would sort things out, It didn't! There was an economic recession instead and sections of industry collapsed..

Also sections of industry wanted government intervention to save them. The free trade Republicans were not prepared to change direction. So America needed a new political direction and Obama was the leader who appeared to offer an alternative. He had a clear populist mantra “yes we can”. He believed in government spending for ordinary people. As a result sections of the previously alienated voters were mobilised. The Obama bandwagon stormed all the way to the White house.

Well Obama hasn't delivered the goods. Despite massive handouts to the likes of General Motors, there has been no net gain in employment which stands at the same level as when he was elected, over eight percent. He has failed to close the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay Cuba.

He has pursued a consistently imperialist foreign policy even though it is less gung-ho than that of George Bush. The powers that be realise that through invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, America has lost of third world authority. The point of Obama and his softly softly approach is to win back this authority. The lowlight being imposing a military dictatorship on the people of Honduras. He has supported the state though not as enthusiastically as the extreme zionists would like. Israel gives him a pass mark though.

The Republicans polled well, in fact they won more seats in the lower house. Obama only became president due to the electoral collage system which is biased towards smaller states. The Republicans have problems though. Overwhelmingly the Latino vote supported Obama. They wont vote Republican because of their hard line on government spending and on immigration.

Obama now faces serious problems. He has a Republican opposition in congress, demanding that he cut back. What concessions he makes, remain to be seen.

Many oppressed and poor Americans still support him. But gone is the “Yes we can” crusade. Obama is now once bitten, twice shy and more modest. He did deliver a health scheme which is under attack. We wonder how long it will last.

Obama may be a nicer bloke than Mitt Romney but the choice should be not between nasty or nice. We want no imperialists at all. This means that we must give no support for Obama's campaign whatsoever! Build a workers revolutionary alternative!

Europe. One day general strike against austerity.

There is plenty to protest about in Europe. There is mass unemployment throughout the Eurozone. Everywhere governments are cutting back services drastically and in the process sacking public servants. There is “award restructuring” meaning slashing wages and destroying conditions. Employed workers are having problems feeding clothing and housing their families. There is mass unemployment. Unemployed find it tougher.

The response to this is a European Trade Union Confederation General Strike held on November 14. #N14 There were general strikes in Spain Portugal, Italy, Greece Belgium, Cyprus and Malta. There were non general solidarity action in Scandinavian countries, Eastern Europe, France, Britain and Germany.

In Italy one in two families can only afford a meal for their children every two days and can't afford medicines or medical treatment

In Greece the government is about to bring to bring down an austerity budget. The workers have responded with their own general strike. The poverty of Greece is well known Unemployment is now over thirty percent. Homelessness has become a mass movement. Unemployment is now over thirty percent and growing. There is a shortage of medicines in hospitals.

In Portugal the unemployment rate is fifteen percent. Unemployed Portuguese are leaving the country in droves.. Wages there are extremely low. Parents are forced to work two or three jobs in order to bring up their families. The government is committed to austerity.

Spain has the greatest gulf between rich and poor in the Eurozone and the highest rate of unemployment . There too, the EU is demanding more cuts.

These are the highlights. There is plenty of poverty and hardship in the richer countries also.

The positive aspect of this action is that it does demonstrate that working people do not intend to take it and are prepared for action throughout

Europe. It poses the need for international solidarity. But the problem is that the aims of this strike are not only non revolutionary. They want a more humane capitalism. They are sowing illusions that the system can be reformed. It cannot.

The danger of this minimalist strike is that it might expose the working class as weak and therefore embolden the extreme right. Of course the actions of workers in Portugal Spain and Italy went beyond the desires of the bureaucrats, There was fighting in the street! But the revolution must be conscious.

This protest general strike is for what they call a social compact in defense of the European social model. They want governments to be enlightened and will listen of reason if a bit of force is applied. The problem is not just bad government but an economic system. Well some governments could be a bit more enlightened putting more of the burden onto the rich as opposed to the poor. But fundamentally it is the laws of the system that force working people to pay. It is the system which is to blame. Capitalism must be overthrown

An impotent leadership such as that of the ETUC must be removed. Such a strike on their minimum demands exposes the working class as weak and not interested in power. But what is the alternative? The decisive question is political leadership. Reformism ties workers to the system, the system of austerity. International unionism is simply not good enough. It only tampers with the affects and not the causes. Smashing the system requires international communist leadership.

A revolutionary communist international must be built. Hopefully a revolutionary general strike movement will develop. This requires leadership which is committed to building workers militias to smash the state, **expropriate the ruling class** and put political power in ordinary peoples hands through a **workers and small farmers government**. It is this type or revolutionary movement which Communist Left is committed to building internationally. Without this leadership, we fear that all this action will lead nowhere.

Refugees hunger strike on Nauru.

Gillard has moved quickly to enact the recommendations of the Houston Committee. One of these recommendations was the re-establishment of “processing centres” on Nauru, Manus Island . This amounts to the return of John Howard’s Pacific solution which Labor so vehemently denounced in opposition and were so happy to bury when elected. They have been forced to eat dirt and enact the same barbaric policy, once again.

Under Howard, the Nauru detention centre was a hell hole with inadequate medical, mental health and basic amenities. There were not enough toilets. Nauru detention under Gillard Labor is almost as barbaric. It is no surprise that refugees are going on hunger strikes, just as they did when Howard enacted his brutal policies.

Nauru is a poor country which has to import water and struggles to provide amenities to its own people. Even with the extra millions of dollars provided by Australia, there is still not enough to service these centres adequately

Well there has been a lot of water under the bridge. The refugees kept coming and Labor kept being exposed by Tony Abbott. The westies and other racists wanted “real action” Abbott was happy to give it to them, even if it meant costing refugee lives. Gillard was seen as impotent, unable to defend Australia’s borders.

So Gillard made a tactical manoeuvre and appointed a “neutral” committee” “in the national interest” to basically reinstate Liberal policies on refugees. The Liberals of course agreed so now there was fundamentally no differences. The victims of this sordid political debate, are, of course, the refugees.

The new Pacific Solution is even crueler than the policies of the Howard era. The Government demands as recommended by the Houston Committee that refugees stay there for years so as not to get any unfair advantage over those who have to wait in camps. This is barbaric and cruel.

Nauru and Manus Island are not part of Australia. So the refugees are out of sight and out of mind at least as far as public opinion is concerned. They are also a long way from any Tamil or Hazaran community. This means they suffer more. On Manus Island people suffer from malaria and dengue fever. So will refugees!

Under Howard, the “Pacific solution” was barbaric. It was not for nothing that refugees sewed their lips and went on hunger strikes,

The centre on Nauru has only been going less than two months and already 300 refugees have gone on hunger strike. It is now almost ended apart from six who carry on. This shows their utter desperation. We must give them hope. We can give them hope through real solidarity. Class solidarity!

Meanwhile it is our role to provide solidarity and support. We must mobilise the working class to take action.

Workers action needed to free the refugees from the Pacific Solution and detention in Australia! Workers action to smash the detention centres and free the refugees is required in Australia.

When we organise effective solidarity it will be should be freed immediately and welcomed to Australia!

When we organize effective solidarity it will be clear to refugees that they don’t have to resort to such desperate measures. In fact they should be freed immediately and welcomed to Australia

Revolutionary communists oppose all immigration controls. We welcome all who want to come to Australia, unconditionally! They should be welcomed whether they are “real refugees” or otherwise. We welcome all to Australia, not just refugees.

Trotskyist Platform and Syria

Trotskyist Platform split formed when a leading member of the Spartacist League of Australia resigned when his proposal for a demonstration in solidarity with the Palm Island uprising was rejected by the majority. The majority argued that such a demo would not be “labour movement centred”. Since then differences have widened. Trotskyist Platform is accused of playing down the need for political revolution in China in TF propaganda and at rallies against counter-revolutionary attacks on China. We actually agree with the accusation. Nevertheless, Trotskyist Platform fundamentally agrees with the Spartacist tradition.

As serious internationalists, TF are obliged to publish analysis of international questions and this they do. Overwhelmingly, the Australian left has been enthusiastic about the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa. In Libya, Trotskyist Platform supports those who supported Qaddafi known as “the Resistance” and opposed the uprising arguing that the TNC had imperialist backing. In Red 94 Communist Left pointed out that this meant effectively backing a military dictatorship which would probably physically smash down the working class. Yes there was imperialist intervention. Libya was bombed. Promoting a dictatorship was not the way to counter it.

With regard to Syria TP are much more explicit. They support the military forces backing Syrian dictator Assad. They don't like the guy but consider blocking with him necessary to counter the imperialist offensive. They reject not only those backing the Free Syrian Army but those who are neutral (like ex-comrades the Spartacist League) which they argue, means that you are indifferent to an imperialist take-over. They

acknowledge differences amongst the resistance but consider these to be of no consequence as all oppositionists are fighting under the same flag and their guns are pointing the same way. Fighting for a better society in Syria they argue must be effectively postponed until Assad is victorious.

Yes there is a lie machine. The Australian media sees events through the eyes of the opposition. They whitewash atrocities committed by the opposition and they suggest that the Syrian military is guilty when it is unclear. This gives us a totally false picture. Yes Free Syrian Army has collaborated with imperialism and this must be more than opposed, condemned. Yes there are sinister Muslim fanatics such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The point is to fight these forces. The issue is how these reactionary forces should be fought and who should fight them. In war as in peace, Revolutionaries want to draw class lines now. TP want to wait until Assad is victorious until a revolutionary intervention is made. Incidentally the Assad regime bears some responsibility of promoting Islamic reaction by repressing Sunnis who are the majority of the population.

As in Libya, the way to fight imperialist collaboration is not a military dictatorship. What has TF got to say to those who deserted due to Syrian Army brutality acting against dissent such as graffiti? Should these deserters have copped it sweet? Should these Syrians submit to Assad brutality and surrender? Some may not have the option of surrender, if it was desirable as they face the prospect of torture or death.

Ordinary Syrians should not have to endure death by the Syrian army. But nor should they have to endure being sold out to imperialism by the Free Syrian Army. The Assad regime, if it holds onto power, would be as brutal and bloody as that of General Pinochet in Chile. Waiting until the end of the war is not a revolutionary option.

Socialist Alternative and Revolutionary Socialist Party – opportunist lash-up.

This impending fusion is really a case of the Revolutionary Socialist Party raising the white flag. Their efforts to build even a small party have clearly failed. It was the RSP who have been making the overtures. The fusion is very much on Socialist Alternative's terms.

The SA and the RSP both believe in some sort of Leninist Party and believe in broad mass movements. Socialist Alternative are less militant than they used to be. But that is where the political agreement ends. They both have a different heritage. Neither have made any reassessment let alone fundamental break from their heritage.

That is why it is an opportunist lash-up.

The Socialist Alternative come from and still identify with the Cliffite tradition which is that of the old International Socialists in Britain which became Socialist Workers Party. They considered the old Soviet Union "state capitalist" and had a strategy of building rank and file organisations on the shop floor "socialism from below". Their explanation for the post war economic boom was the "permanent arms economy" meaning that arms spending could stabilise capitalism. Arms spending helped destroy the Soviet Union Leninist critics of this tradition point out that not confronting politics means adapting to bourgeois politics and this is what the old IS did. In fact they supported British troops in Ireland initially, when Britain invaded. They changed line later. In fighting fascism, they initiated the Anti Nazi League which instead of using methods of class struggle mobilised around respectable people such as clergy pop stars, Neil Kinnock and the Liberal Democrats.

The RSP have their roots in the US Socialist Workers Party which was Trotskyist when Trotsky was alive. This party developed its strategy during the Vietnam War. They were part of the protest movement. Basically they argued for broad movements around single issues. Troops Out Now! Was their key demand for the Vietnam protest movement. The demand, they argued meant as broad a movement as possible without identifying with Stalinism. This it was. It was so broad that it included the US Democrats. Their participation, they argued was "their contradiction

not ours". Effectively they gave up class struggle to get this broad class-collaborationist movement.

Only revolution can stop war is what real Leninists say.

Their politics degenerated further under the influence of the Cuban revolution. Castro, they argued was an unconscious Trotskyist. Of course it was pointed out that Castro's strategy was in contradiction to Trotsky. Well, they abandoned Trotsky who they now consider a "hopeless sectarian" and now consider themselves just to be Leninist.. In Australia, the Percy leadership went even further and identified with the Stalinist Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam. Percy and Lorimer, the RSP leaders went even further along the Stalinist road than the US SWP.

Well you would think that two groups with such divergent methods would have little in common. This fusion is sheer opportunism – especially on behalf of the RSP. In no way will they be allowed to publically campaign in relation to the international importance of the Cuban revolution if they fuse.

For Socialist Alternative, Castro and co are the ruling class exploiting the Cuban workers and peasants. They have no intention of changing line. So basically Percy, Lorimer et al who consider Cuba and Castro revolutionary and a beacon for the world revolution, are surrendering what they consider to be fundamental principles. What they have in common is class. Both want to build a so-called revolutionary party out of the radical middle class. It will be a party with some revolutionary rhetoric but will reflect ideology the interests of that class. It won't have a revolutionary programme.

Socialist Alternative can smell victory. They are making overtures towards the Socialist Alliance. They aim to be the dominant hegemonic party of the Australian left and this fusion suggests that they are succeeding. They are making overtures to the rest of the left to jump on their bandwagon. For RSP it is a fusion of failure, to build a party. Percy and Lorimer want a middle class party of the big movement. They don't appear to want to allow principles to get in the way.

The Legacy of Whitlam. 40 years after “Its Time”

On November 12 1973 forty years ago, Gough Whitlam gave his famous speech at Blacktown Town Hall in a western suburb of Sydney.. One of the most famous speeches in Australian history, it struck a chord with the sentiments and aspirations of progressive middle Australia. It had been more than twenty years since the previous Labor government. Whitlam did not pitch his speech at the working class but middle class people who wanted change.

In 1972 things were prosperous though there was some unemployment (small by today’s standard). This was a sign of an impending crisis. Yet though Australia was a prosperous country it was a socially backward country. Australia was lacking when it came to having a welfare state. The culturally enlightened middle class wanted culture, more progressive education, a more enlightened attitude to sexuality, There was mass support for, Aboriginal rights and an end to the horrendous “White Australia” racist immigration policy. Of course, they wanted a government which would pull out of Vietnam and end conscription. They wanted equal pay for women and women’s rights in general. Whitlam homed in on these sentiments.. His “Its Time” speech and slogan did this very well. Whitlam Labor was elected.

Whitlam was backward on working class and union issues. He believed that workers should moderate claims in order to enjoy the benefits of his reforms.

Whitlam withdrew Australian troops from Vietnam and abolished conscription. This was expected as the US and ally Australia, were losing the war.

Whitlam offered a different style of foreign policy. He still believed in the US Australian alliance but wanted more autonomy to exert a mini-imperialist domination of South East Asia and the Pacific. In Opposition Whitlam attacked the Liberals for allowing the US to have bases but not allowing Australia to have any say, let alone control. In government he sold this out allowing US to build a base at North West Cape Western Australia.

Papua New Guinea was given independence on Australia’s terms which meant no self-

determination for the people of Bougainville. They had been fighting CRA backed by the armed force of the Australian government. The islanders opposed the copper mine and wanted an independent Bougainville. Thanks to Whitlam’s arrogant policies there was a war between Bougainville and Papua New Guinea (backed by Australia) which lasted for decades!

He didn’t think an independent East Timor was viable either and therefore permitted Indonesia to take the island over. They took over with brutal military force.

For one year things remained prosperous, Whitlam had kept his promises including the introduction of health scheme Medibank which was a free scheme as opposed to Medicare which is an insurance scheme. Then the wheels fell off as the crisis hit.

The crisis was global. Whitlam was totally unprepared. So incidentally were most bourgeois forces.. Whitlam responded to this by attempting to shackle the unions. He cutback spending especially on welfare. Unemployment hit hard in 1975 but the Hayden budget of was the first to cut back on welfare and benefits since the Second World War!

Not only was there a crisis, there was massive restructuring. Australian manufacturing had only developed in the post war boom period. It suffered from being poorly capitalised, under equipt and suffering from a small local market. It was ripe for collapse, and did. This was especially true for the car industry. When Leyland plant in Waterloo Sydney closed Whitlam actually financially assisted the company close and lay-off workers . The workers received peanuts in compensation.

Whitlam is famous for being sacked by the governor general after the Senate blocked supply. The mass movement to defend him was massive and militant. Whitlam’s sacking was a major injustice. It showed Australia was not a democracy. Whitlam was fettered by a Senate representing states, a governor general who is the Queens representative. All this has to go. For a republic!

Whitlam delivered a few minor gains. But, on the whole, his was not a major reforming government.

There were many aspects of Whitlam 's policies which were reactionary. But basically, he had no answers to the economic crisis and began the bosses offensive continued by Fraser, Hawke, Keating and Howard. It continues to this day.

In no way was his government socialist. He didn't nationalise any industry. His major gain, the free health scheme Medibank was inferior to the New Zealand public health scheme at that time.

The right has learnt from the failure of Whitlam to defend his own government They believe that if you can't beat them, join them. This they have effectively done. Rudd and Gillard openly flaunt their economic conservative credentials. They are socially conservative also.

Workers must learn that the only way forward is revolution.

Whilst there are some interesting lessons which can be drawn from the Whitlam experience, the alternative to today's tory labourism is not yesterday's more idealistic version but a revolutionary alternative

COMMUNIST LEFT

Communist Left is a revolutionary propaganda group committed to fighting for a class conscious working class.

This means fighting for a political alternative to Labor and all forms of reformism centrism and Stalinism

We fight for the overthrow of capitalism, the smashing of the capitalist state. This means that we support not a parliamentary government but a revolutionary workers and small farmers' government.

We are for international solidarity and a Fifth Revolutionary Communist International.

PO Box 260 St Peters NSW Australia 2044
xred39@hotmail.com
<http://communistleftaustralia.yolasite.com>

Socialist Alternative and Revolutionary Socialist Party.

Socialist Alternative and Revolutionary Socialist Party – an opportunist lash-up

