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Two Local Wars

Situationist International

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The Arab-Israel war was a dirty trick played by modern history on the good conscience of the Left, which was communing in the great spectacle of its protest against the Vietnam war. The false consciousness that saw in the National Liberation Front the champion of “socialist revolution” against American imperialism could only get entangled and collapse amidst its insurmountable contradictions when it had to decide between Israel and Nasser. Yet throughout all its ludicrous polemics it never stopped proclaiming that one side or the other was completely in the right, or even that one or another of their perspectives was revolutionary.

In immigrating into underdeveloped regions, the revolutionary struggle was subjected to a double alienation: that of an impotent Left facing an overdeveloped capitalism it was in no way capable of combatting, and that of the laboring masses in the colonized countries who inherited the remains of a mutilated revolution and have had to suffer its defects. The absence of a revolutionary movement in Europe has reduced the Left to its simplest expression: a mass of spectators who swoon with rapture each time the exploited in the colonies take up arms against their masters, and who cannot help seeing these uprisings as the epitome of Revolution. At the same time, the absence from political life of the proletariat as a class-for-itself (and for us the proletariat is revolutionary or it is nothing) has allowed this Left to become the “Knight of Virtue” in a world without virtue. But when it bewails its situation and complains about the “world order” being at odds with its good intentions, and when it maintains its poor yearnings in the face of this order, it is in fact attached to this order as to its own essence. If this order was taken away from it, it would lose everything. The European Left is so pitiful that, like a traveler in the desert longing for a single drop of water, it seems to aspire for nothing more than the meager feeling of an abstract objection. From the little with which it is satisfied one can measure the extent of its poverty. It is as alien to history as the proletariat is alien to this world. False consciousness is its natural condition, the spectacle is its element, and the apparent opposition of systems is its universal frame of reference: wherever there is a conflict it always sees Good fighting Evil, “total revolution” versus “total reaction.”

The attachment of this spectator consciousness to alien causes remains irrational, and its virtuous protests flounder in the tortuous paths of its guilt. Most of the “Vietnam Committees” in France split up during the “Six-Day War” and some of the war resistance groups in the United States also revealed their reality. “One cannot be at the same time for the Vietnamese and against the Jews menaced with extermination,” is the cry of some. “Can you fight against the Americans in Vietnam while supporting their allies, the Zionist aggressors?” is the reply of others. And then they plunge into Byzantine discussions. Sartre hasn’t recovered from it

yet. In fact this whole fine lot does not actually fight what it condemns, nor does it really know much about the forces it supports. Its opposition to the American war is almost always combined with unconditional support of the Vietcong; but in any case this opposition remains spectacular for everyone. Those who were really opposed to Spanish fascism went to fight it. No one has yet gone off to fight "Yankee imperialism." The consumers of illusory participation are offered a whole range of spectacular choices: pacifist demonstrations; Stalino-Gaullist nationalism against the Americans (Humphrey's visit was the sole occasion the French Communist Party has demonstrated with its remaining faithful); the sale of the Vietnam Newsletter or of publicity handouts from Ho Chi Minh's state. Neither the Provos (before their dissolution) nor the Berlin students have been able to go beyond the narrow framework of anti-imperialist "action."

The antiwar movement in America has naturally been more serious since it finds itself face to face with the real enemy. Some of these young rebels, however, end up by simplistically identifying with the apparent enemies of their real enemies; which reinforces the confusion of a working class already subjected to the worst brutalization and mystification, and contributes to maintaining it in that "reactionary" state of mind from which one draws arguments against it.

Guevara's critique seems to us more important since it has its roots in real struggles, but it falls short by default. Che is certainly one of the last consistent Leninists of our time. But like Epimenides, he seems to have slept for the last fifty years to be able to believe that there is still a "progressive bloc," which for some strange reason is "lapsing." This bureaucratic and romantic revolutionary only sees in imperialism the ultimate stage of capitalism, struggling against a society that is socialist in spite of its imperfections.

The USSR's embarrassingly evident defects are coming to seem more and more "natural." As for China, according to an official declaration it remains "ready to accept all national sacrifices to support North Vietnam against the USA" (in lieu of supporting the workers of Hong Kong) "and constitutes the most solid and secure rear guard for the Vietnamese people in their struggle against imperialism." In fact, no one doubts that if the last Vietnamese were killed, Mao's bureaucratic China would still be intact. (According to Izvestia, China and the United States have already concluded a mutual nonintervention pact.)

Neither the manichean consciousness of the virtuous Left nor the bureaucracy are capable of seeing the profound unity of today's world. Dialectics is their common enemy. Revolutionary criticism begins beyond good and evil; it is rooted in history and operates on the totality of the existing world. In no case can it applaud a belligerent state or support the bureaucracy of an exploitive state in the process

of formation. It must first of all lay bare the truth of present struggles by putting them back into their historical context, and unmask the hidden aims of the forces officially in conflict. The arm of critique is the prelude to the critique by arms.

The peaceful coexistence of bourgeois and bureaucratic lies ended up prevailing over the lie of their confrontation. The balance of terror was broken in Cuba in 1962 with the rout of the Russians. Since that time American imperialism has been the unchallenged master of the world. And it can remain so only by aggression since it has no chance of seducing the disinherited, who are more easily attracted to the Sino-Soviet model. State capitalism is the natural tendency of colonized societies, where the state is generally formed before the historical classes. The total elimination of its capital and its commodities from the world market is the deadly threat that haunts the American propertied class and its free-enterprise economy — this is the key to its aggressive rage.

Since the great crisis of 1929, state intervention has been more and more conspicuous in market mechanisms; the economy can no longer function steadily without massive expenditures by the state, the main “consumer” of all noncommercial production (especially that of the armament industries). This does not save it from remaining in a state of permanent crisis and in constant need of expanding its public sector at the expense of its private sector. A relentless logic pushes the system toward increasingly state-controlled capitalism, generating severe social conflicts.

The profound crisis of the American system lies in its inability to produce sufficient profits on the social scale. It must therefore achieve abroad what it cannot do at home, namely increase the amount of profit in proportion to the amount of existing capital. The propertied class, which also more or less possesses the state, relies on its imperialist enterprises to realize this insane dream. For this class, pseudocommunist state capitalism means death just as much as does authentic communism; that is why it is essentially incapable of seeing any difference between them.

The artificial functioning of the monopolistic economy as a “war economy” ensures, for the moment, that the ruling-class policy is willingly supported by the workers, who enjoy full employment and a spectacular abundance: “At the moment, the proportion of labor employed in jobs connected with national defense amounts to 5.2% of the total American labor force, compared with 3.9% two years ago. . . . The number of civil jobs in the national defense sector has increased from 3,000,000 to 4,100,000 over the last two years” (Le Monde, 17 September 1967). Meanwhile, market capitalism vaguely feels that by extending its territorial control it will achieve an accelerated expansion capable of balancing the ever-increasing demands of non-profit-making production. The ferocious

Unlike the American war, the Palestinian question has no immediately evident solution. No short-term solution is feasible. The Arab regimes can only crumble under the weight of their contradictions and Israel will be more and more the prisoner of its colonial logic. All the compromises that the great powers try to piece together are bound to be counterrevolutionary in one way or another. The hybrid status quo — neither peace nor war — will probably prevail for a long period, during which the Arab regimes will meet with the same fate as their predecessors of 1948 (probably at first to the profit of the openly reactionary forces). Arab society, which has produced all sorts of ruling classes caricaturing all the classes of history, must now produce the forces that will bring about its total subversion. The so-called national bourgeoisie and the Arab bureaucracy have inherited all the defects of those two classes without ever having known the historical accomplishments those classes achieved in other societies. The future Arab revolutionary forces that will arise from the ruins of the June 1967 defeat must know that they have nothing in common with any existing Arab regime and nothing to respect among the powers that dominate the present world. They will find their model in themselves and in the repressed experiences of revolutionary history. The Palestinian question is too serious to be left to the states, that is, to the colonels. It is too close to the two basic questions of modern revolution — internationalism and the state — for any existing force to be able to provide an adequate solution. Only an Arab revolutionary movement that is resolutely internationalist and anti-state can dissolve the state of Israel while gaining the support of that state’s exploited masses. And only through the same process will it be able to dissolve all the existing Arab states and create Arab unity through the power of the Councils.

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As for Israel, it has become everything that the Arabs had accused it of before the war: an imperialist state behaving like the most classic occupation forces (police terror, dynamiting of houses, permanent martial law, etc.). Internally a collective hysteria, led by the rabbis, is developing around "Israel's inalienable right to its Biblical borders." The war put a stop to the whole movement of internal struggles generated by the contradictions of this artificial society (in 1966 there were several dozen riots, and in 1965 alone there were no fewer than 277 strikes) and provoked unanimous support for the objectives of the ruling class and its most extremist ideology. It also served to shore up all the Arab regimes not involved in the armed struggle. Boumédiène could thus, from 3000 miles away, enter the chorus of political braggadocio and have his name applauded by the Algerian crowd before which he had not even dared to appear the day before, and finally obtain the support of a totally Stalinized ORP ("for his anti-imperialist policy"). Faisal, for a few million dollars, obtained Egypt's withdrawal from Yemen and the strengthening of his throne. Etc., etc.

As always, war, when not civil, only freezes the process of social revolution. In North Vietnam it has brought about the peasants' support, never before given, for the bureaucracy that exploits them. In Israel it has killed off for a long time any opposition to Zionism, and in the Arab countries it is reinforcing — temporarily — the most reactionary strata. In no way can revolutionary currents find anything there with which to identify. Their task is at the opposite pole of the present movement since it must be its absolute negation.

It is obviously impossible at present to seek a revolutionary solution to the Vietnam war. It is first of all necessary to put an end to the American aggression in order to allow the real social struggle in Vietnam to develop in a natural way; i.e. to allow the Vietnamese workers and peasants to rediscover their enemies at home: the bureaucracy of the North and the propertied and ruling strata of the South. Once the Americans withdraw, the Stalinist bureaucracy will seize control of the whole country — there's no getting around this. Because the invaders cannot indefinitely sustain their aggression; ever since Talleyrand it has been a commonplace that one can do anything with a bayonet except sit on it. The point is not to give unconditional (or even conditional) support to the Vietcong, but to struggle consistently and uncompromisingly against American imperialism. The most effective role is presently being played by those American revolutionaries who are advocating and practicing insubordination and draft resistance on a very large scale (compared to which the resistance to the Algerian war in France was child's play). The Vietnam war is rooted in America and it is from there that it must be rooted out.

defense of regions of the "free" world where its interests are often trifling (in 1959 American investments in South Vietnam did not exceed 50 million dollars) is part of a long-term strategy that hopes eventually to be able to write off military expenditures as mere business expenses in ensuring the United States not only a market but also the monopolistic control of the means of production of the greater part of the world. But everything works against this project. On one hand, the internal contradictions of private capitalism: particular interests conflict with the general interest of the propertied class as a whole, as with groups that make short-term profits from state contracts (notably arms manufacturers) or monopolistic enterprises that are reluctant to invest in underdeveloped countries, where productivity is very low in spite of cheap labor, preferring instead the "advanced" part of the world (especially Europe, which is still more profitable than saturated America). On the other hand, it clashes with the immediate interests of the disinherited masses, whose first move can only be to eliminate the indigenous strata that exploit them, which are the only strata able to ensure the United States any infiltration whatsoever.

According to Rostow, the "growth" specialist of the State Department, Vietnam is for the moment only the first testing ground for this vast strategy, which, to ensure its exploitive peace, must start with a war of destruction that can hardly succeed. The aggressiveness of American imperialism is thus in no way the aberration of a bad administration, but a necessity for the class relations of private capitalism, which, if not overthrown by a revolutionary movement, unrelentingly evolves toward a technocratic state capitalism. The history of the alienated struggles of our time can only be understood in this context of a still undominated global economy.

The destruction of the old "Asiatic" structures by colonial penetration gave rise to a new urban stratum while increasing the pauperization of a large portion of the super-exploited peasantry. The conjuncture of these two forces constituted the driving force of the Vietnamese movement. Among the urban strata (petty bourgeois and even bourgeois) were formed the first nationalist nuclei and the skeleton of what was to be, from 1930 on, the Indochinese Communist Party. Its adherence to Bolshevik ideology (in its Stalinist version), which led it to graft an essentially agrarian program onto the purely nationalist one, enabled the ICP to become the leading force of the anticolonial struggle and to marshal the great mass of peasants who had spontaneously risen. The "peasant soviets" of 1931 were the first manifestation of this movement. But by linking its fate to that of the Third International, the ICP subjected itself to all the vicissitudes of Stalinist diplomacy and to the fluctuations of the national and state interests of the Russian

bureaucracy. After the Seventh Comintern Congress (August 1935) “the struggle against French imperialism” vanished from the program and was soon replaced by a struggle against the powerful Trotskyist party. “As for the Trotskyists, no alliances, no concessions; they must be unmasked for what they are: the agents of fascism” (Report of Ho Chi Minh to the Comintern, July 1939). The Hitler-Stalin Pact and the banning of the Communist Party in France and its colonies allowed the ICP to change its line: “Our party finds it a matter of life or death . . . to struggle against the imperialist war and the French policy of piracy and massacre” (i.e. against Nazi Germany), “but we will at the same time combat the aggressive aims of Japanese fascism.”

Toward the end of World War II, with the effective help of the Americans, the Vietminh was in control of the greater part of the country and was recognized by France as the sole representative of Indochina. It was at this point that Ho preferred “to sniff a little French shit rather than eat Chinese shit for a lifetime” and signed, to make the task of his colleague-masters easier, the monstrous compromise of 1946, which recognized Vietnam as both a “free state” and as “belonging to the Indochinese Federation of the French Union.” This compromise enabled France to reconquer part of the country and, at the same time the Stalinists lost their share of bourgeois power in France, to wage a war that lasted eight years, at the end of which the Vietminh gave up the South to the most retrograde strata and their American protectors and definitively won the North for itself. After systematically eliminating the remaining revolutionary elements (the last Trotskyist leader, Ta Tu Thau, was assassinated by 1946) the Vietminh bureaucracy imposed its totalitarian power on the peasantry and started the industrialization of the country within a state-capitalist framework. Improving the lot of the peasants, following their conquests during the long liberation struggle, was, in line with bureaucratic logic, subordinated to the interests of the rising state: the goal was to be greater productivity, with the state remaining the uncontested master of that production. The authoritarian implementation of agrarian reform gave rise in 1956 to violent insurrections and bloody repression (above all in Ho Chi Minh’s own native province). The peasants who had carried the bureaucracy to power were to be its first victims. For several years afterwards the bureaucracy tried to smother the memory of this “serious mistake” in an “orgy of self-criticism.”

But the same Geneva agreements enabled the Diem clique to set up, south of the 17th parallel, a bureaucratic, feudal and theocratic state in the service of the landowners and compradore bourgeoisie. Within a few years this state was to nullify, by a few suitable “agrarian reforms,” everything the peasantry had won. The peasants of the South, some of whom had never laid down their arms, were

The latest war has dissipated all these illusions. The total rigidity of “Arab ideology” was pulverized on contact with a reality that was just as hard but also permanent. Those who spoke of waging a war neither wanted it nor prepared for it, while those who spoke only of defending themselves actually prepared the offensive. Each of the two camps followed their respective propensities — the Arab bureaucracy that for lying and demagogy, the masters of Israel that for imperialist expansion. The most important lesson of the Six-Day War is a negative one: it has revealed all the secret weaknesses and defects of what was presented as the “Arab Revolution.” The “powerful” military bureaucracy of Egypt crumbled to dust in two days, disclosing all at once the secret reality of its achievements: the fact that the axis around which all the socioeconomic transformations took place — the Army — has remained fundamentally the same. On one hand, it claimed to be changing everything in Egypt (and even in the Arab world as a whole); on the other, it did everything to avoid any transformation in itself, in its values or its habits. Nasser’s Egypt is still dominated by pre-Nasser forces; its bureaucracy is an agglomeration without coherence or class consciousness, united only by exploitation and the division of the social surplus-value.

As for the politico-military machine that governs Baathist Syria, it is entrenching itself more and more in the extremism of its ideology. But its rhetoric takes in no one anymore (except Pablo!).⁴ Everyone knows that it did not fight and that it gave up the front without resistance because it preferred to keep its best troops in Damascus for its own defense. Those who have consumed 65% of the Syrian budget in the name of defending the country have definitively unmasked their own cynical lies.

Finally, the war has shown, to those who still needed showing, that a Holy Alliance with someone like Hussein can only lead to disaster. The Arab Legion [Jordanian Army] withdrew on the first day and the Palestinian population, which had suffered for twenty years under its police terror, found itself unarmed and unorganized in the face of the Israeli occupation forces. Since 1948 the Hashemite throne had shared the colonization of the Palestinians with the Zionist state. By deserting the West Bank it gave the Israelis the police files on all the Palestinian revolutionary elements. But the Palestinians have always known that there was no great difference between the two colonizations, and the blatancy of the new occupation at least makes the terrain of resistance clearer.

1963. Aref: head of Iraqi government 1963-1966. Hussein: king of Jordan. Faisal: king of Saudi Arabia.

⁴ Pablo: pseudonym of Michalis N. Raptis, leader of a Trotskyist tendency.

it to the conference table and to reactionary compromises. Only the victory of the fullest, most radical implications of that uprising could have destroyed both the British Mandate and the Zionist goal of setting up a Jewish state. Its failure heralded the disasters to come and ultimately the defeat of 1948.

That latter defeat signaled the end of the “bourgeois-feudality” as the leading class of the Arab movement. It provided the opportunity for the petty bourgeoisie to come to power and to constitute, with the officers of the defeated army, the driving force of the present movement. Its program was simple: Arab unity, a vaguely socialist ideology, and the liberation of Palestine (the Return). The Tripartite aggression of 1956² provided it with the best opportunity to consolidate itself as a ruling class and to find a leader-program in the person of Nasser, who was presented for the collective admiration of the completely dispossessed Arab masses. He was their religion and their opium. But the new exploiting class had its own interests and goals. The slogans used by the bureaucratic-military regime of Egypt to win popular support were already bad in themselves; in addition, the regime was incapable of carrying them out. Arab unity and the destruction of Israel (invoked successively as the liquidation of the usurper state or as the pure and simple driving of the Israeli population into the sea) were the core of this propaganda-ideology.

What ushered in the decline of the Arab petty bourgeoisie and its bureaucratic power was first of all its own internal contradictions and the superficiality of its options (Nasser, the Baath Party, Kassem and the so-called “Communist” parties have never ceased fighting each other and compromising and allying with the most dubious forces).

Twenty years after the first Palestinian war, this new stratum has just demonstrated its total inability to resolve the Palestinian problem. It has lived by delirious bluff, for it was only able to survive by constantly raising the specter of Israel, being utterly incapable of effecting any radical solution whatsoever to the innumerable domestic problems. The Palestinian problem remains the key to the Arab power struggles. It is everyone’s central reference point and all conflicts hinge on it. It is the basis of the objective solidarity of all the Arab regimes. It produces the “Holy Alliance” between Nasser and Hussein, Faisal and Boumédiène, Aref and the Baath.³

² Tripartite aggression: England, France and Israel’s joint attack on Egypt during the 1956 “Suez crisis.”

³ Baath Party: Pan-Arabic party, rival factions of which have ruled Syria and Iraq since the 1960s (until the 2003 US-led invasion overthrew the Iraqi branch). Kassem: head of Iraqi government 1958-

to fall back in the grip of oppression and superexploitation. This is the second Vietnam war. The mass of insurgent peasants, taking up arms once more against their old enemies, also followed once again their old leaders. The National Liberation Front succeeded the Vietminh, inheriting both its qualities and its grave defects. By making itself the champion of national struggle and peasant war, the NLF immediately won over the countryside and made it the main base of armed resistance. Its successive victories over the official army provoked the increasingly massive intervention of the Americans, to the point of reducing the conflict to an open colonial war, with the Vietnamese pitted against an invading army. Its determination in the struggle, its clearly antifeudal program and its unitary perspectives remain the principal qualities of the movement. But in no way does the NLF’s struggle go beyond the classical framework of national liberation struggles. Its program remains based on a compromise among a vast coalition of classes, dominated by the overriding goal of wiping out the American aggression. It is no accident that it rejects the title “Vietcong” (i.e. Vietnamese communists) and insists on its national character. Its structures are those of a state-in-formation: in the zones under its control it already levies taxes and institutes compulsory military service.

These minimal qualities in the struggle and the social objectives that they express remain totally absent in the confrontation between Israel and the Arabs. The specific contradictions of Zionism and of splintered Arab society add to the general confusion.

Since its origins the Zionist movement has been the contrary of the revolutionary solution to what used to be called the “Jewish question.” A direct product of European capitalism, it did not aim at the overthrow of a society that needed to persecute Jews, but at the creation of a Jewish national entity that would be protected from the anti-Semitic aberrations of decadent capitalism. It did not strive to abolish injustice, but to transfer it. The original sin of Zionism is that it has always acted as if Palestine were a desert island. The revolutionary workers movement saw the answer to the Jewish question in proletarian community, that is, in the destruction of capitalism and “its religion, Judaism”; the emancipation of the Jews could not take place apart from the emancipation of humanity. Zionism started from the opposite hypothesis. As a matter of fact, the counter-revolutionary development of the last half century proved it right, but in the same way as the development of European capitalism proved right the reformist theses of Bernstein. The success of Zionism and its corollary, the creation of the state of Israel, is merely a miserable by-product of the triumph of world counterrevolution. To “socialism in a single country” came the echo “justice for a single people”

and “equality in a single kibbutz.” The colonization of Palestine was organized with Rothschild capital, and the first kibbutzim were set up with European surplus-value. The Jews recreated for themselves all the fanaticism and segregation they had been victims of. Those who had suffered mere toleration in their society were to struggle to become in another country owners disposing of the right to tolerate others. The kibbutz was not a revolutionary supersession of Palestinian “feudalism,” but a mutualist formula for the self-defense of Jewish worker-settlers against the capitalist exploitive tendencies of the Jewish Agency. Because it was the main Jewish owner of Palestine, the Zionist Organization defined itself as the sole representative of the superior interests of the “Jewish Nation.” If it eventually allowed a certain degree of self-management, it was because it was sure that this would be based on the systematic rejection of the Arab peasant.

As for the Histadrut [the Israeli labor union], it was since its inception in 1920 subjected to the authority of world Zionism, that is, to the direct opposite of workers’ emancipation. Arab workers were statutorily excluded from it and its activity often consisted of forbidding Jewish businesses to employ them.

The development of the three-way struggle between the Arabs, the Zionists and the British was to be turned to the profit of the Zionists. Thanks to the active patronage of the Americans (since the end of World War II) and the blessing of Stalin (who saw Israel as the first “socialist” bastion in the Middle East, but also as a way to rid himself of some annoying Jews), it did not take long before Herzl’s dream was realized and the Jewish state was arbitrarily proclaimed. The cooption of all the “progressive” forms of social organization and their integration within the Zionist ideal enabled even the most “revolutionary” individuals to work in good conscience for the building of the bourgeois, militaristic, rabbinical state that modern Israel has become. The prolonged sleep of proletarian internationalism once more brought forth a monster. The basic injustice against the Palestinian Arabs came back to roost with the Jews themselves: the State of the Chosen People was nothing but one more class society in which all the aberrations of the old societies were recreated (hierarchical divisions, tribal opposition between the Ashkenazi and the Sephardim, racist persecution of the Arab minority, etc.). The labor union assumed its normal function of integrating workers into a capitalist economy, an economy of which it itself has become the main owner. It employs more workers than the state itself, and presently constitutes the bridgehead of the imperialist expansion of the new Israeli capitalism. (“Solel Boneh,” an important construction branch of the Histadrut, invested 180 million dollars in Africa and Asia from 1960 to 1966 and currently employs 12,000 African workers.)

And just as this state could never have seen the light of day without the direct intervention of Anglo-American imperialism and the massive aid of Jewish finance capital, it cannot balance its artificial economy today without the aid of the same forces that created it. (The annual balance of payments deficit is 600 million dollars, that is, more for each Israeli inhabitant than the average earnings of an Arab worker.) Since the settling of the first immigrant colonies, the Jews have formed a modern, European-style society alongside the economically and socially backward Arab society; the proclamation of the state of Israel only completed this process by the pure and simple expulsion of the backward elements. Israel forms by its very existence the bastion of Europe in the heart of an Afro-Asian world. Thus it has become doubly alien: to the Arab population, permanently reduced to the status of refugees or of colonized minority; and to the Jewish population, which had for a moment seen in it the earthly fulfillment of all egalitarian ideologies.

But this is due not only to the contradictions of Israeli society. From the outset this situation has been constantly maintained and aggravated by the surrounding Arab societies, which have so far proved incapable of any contribution toward an effective solution.

Throughout the British Mandate period the Arab resistance in Palestine was completely dominated by the propertied class: the Arab ruling classes and their British protectors. The Sykes-Picot Agreement put an end to the hopes of the Arab nationalism that was just beginning to develop, and subjected the skillfully carved up area to a foreign domination that is far from being over.¹ The same strata that ensured the Ottoman Empire’s domination over the Arab masses turned to the service of the British occupation and became accomplices of Zionist colonization (by the sale, at very inflated prices, of their land). The backwardness of Arab society did not yet allow for the emergence of new and more advanced leaderships, and every spontaneous popular upheaval ran into the same coopters: the “bourgeois-feudal” notables and their commodity: national unity.

The armed insurgence of 1936-1939 and the six-month general strike (the longest in history) were decided and carried out in spite of opposition from the leadership of all the “nationalist” parties. They were widespread and spontaneously organized; this forced the ruling class to join them so as to take over the leadership of the movement. But this was in order to put a check on it, to lead

¹ British Mandate: British protectorate over Palestine (1920-1948). Sykes-Picot Agreement: a secret agreement made between England, France and Russia in 1916 to divide up the former Ottoman Empire possessions among themselves after the end of World War I. In 1917 the Bolsheviks discovered the document in the Russian state archives and publicly divulged and repudiated it, much to the embarrassment of the French and British governments.