

International VIEWPOINT

Issue 200

February 18, 1991

£1; \$2.25; C\$3; 14FF



INSIDE:

★ GEORGE BUSH'S WAR

Analysis, US antiwar, news control, economic consequences

★ GORBACHEV'S CRACKDOWN

The struggle for economic power, looking down the Chilean road

★ Plus

The current state of the world capitalist economy ★ and more

CB/193

pictures of Israelis receiving their gas masks. Every new Russian Jewish immigrant is given a gas mask on arrival at Ben Gurion airport. New York mayor David Dinkins, currently on a nauseating solidarity mission to Israel, has been pictured trying on his mask.

However, the army and the civil administration in the occupied territories have done everything possible to prevent or hinder the distribution of gas masks to the Palestinian population. The initial claim, that they were not in danger, was contradicted by the distribution of masks to West Bank Jewish settlers. The government then said that, unlike Israelis, Palestinians would have to pay for their masks because they did not pay taxes (the latter claim, reported uncritically in the Western press, is untrue).

Finally, on the eve of the war, a Bethlehem inhabitant won a ruling from the Israeli High Court, that there had been "discrimination" in the distribution of masks. The government responded that it only had 173,000 masks available for the 1.5 million Palestinians, and it is now saying that distribution will take several months — or until the war is over. Palestinian political prisoners have been denied gas masks or, as in the case of the Megiddo camp, near to Haifa, given them without filters.

Zionist left rejoins camp of national unity

Under the impact of the confrontation with Iraq, the Zionist left and the human rights organizations have passed back into the camp of national unity, as is traditional when Israel's "right to exist" is deemed to be in danger. The image of Saddam as the new Hitler, bent on the physical annihilation of Israel, has had a powerful effect (in fact, the position of the Iraqi government on the question of Israel has for many years been the same as that of the other Arab states; for an international peace conference to guarantee the security of all states in the region, including Israel and a Palestinian state).

The Gulf crisis has led to the defection from the Israeli peace camp of many "beautiful souls" whose opposition to the occupation had always been posited in terms of the psychic damage it was causing to Israel's collective unconscious, rather than any commitment to genuine self-determination for the Palestinians. For such people, Palestinians have national rights only on sufferance and on the promise of good behaviour, a criterion which they in no way apply to their own national entity. Veteran left Zionists like Yossi Sarid and writers like Amos Oz have joined the war hysteria and denounced the Palestinians for "letting them down".

Worse, Palestinians are accused of having "cheered on" the missile attacks on Tel Aviv and Haifa (the "cheering on" by

the Israeli government of the assault on Iraq apparently does not negate Israel's right to self-determination). However, the attitude of those on the left of the peace movement appears to be more differentiated, and many are committed to continuing the struggle against the occupation, regardless of their views on the war.

Meanwhile, Shamir's government is putting to good use Israel's newly glossy international image, obtained through its policy of "restraint" in the face of missile attacks. Substantial foreign aid from the European Community and the US has been sought and partially provided, and the International Monetary Fund is also to be approached. At the same time, Shamir has sent clear signals that there will be no softening of his government's position on the Palestinian question, whatever the aftermath of the war.

A first sign of this was the arrest and detention of leading Palestinian "moderate" Sari Nusseibeh on patently absurd charges of spying for Iraq. This move has been denounced even by the *New York Times*, which normally portrays Israel as a combination of Periclean Athens and the Big Rock Candy Mountain. It is a continuation of the policy, exemplified also with the detention of Ziad Abu Zayyad and Radwan Abu Ayyash last November, of dealing with "the danger of peace" through attacks on the wing of the Palestinian national movement most favourable to Arafat's line of recognition of, and coexistence with, Israel. The government is keen to use the Gulf conflict to undermine Arafat's credibility in particular, hence the targeting of Fatah "bases" (the media's favoured euphemism for Palestinian refugee camps and villages) in the recent Israeli attacks on southern Lebanon.

Cabinet appointment of advocate of expulsion

Shamir's stance was underlined still further by his firm rejection on February 4 of any post war international peace conference, and the appointment to the cabinet of Rechavam Ze'evi, the leader of the Moledet party which advocates the forcible expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied territories.

Ze'evi is not exactly a vulgar fascist huckster in the Kahane mould; he comes from a Labour background and he is fond of pointing out (quite correctly) the continuity between his positions and the discourse of racial separation central to traditional Labour (and particularly left Labour) Zionist thinking. Nonetheless, his appointment tilts still further to the right a cabinet already so reactionary that it would be considered off the political map in almost any other country.

The idea of transfer has, in any case, already been floated, if not openly advocated, by several prominent government figures. Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan

has long advocated what amounts to a policy of "selective transfer". Minister of Energy and Science Yuval Ne'eman recently warned Palestinians that continuation of the *intifada* would place them in a "1948 situation". Deputy foreign minister Binyamin Netanyahu has publicly aired his regrets that Israel did not carry out expulsions when the world's attention was on the Tiananmen Square massacre in China.

A majority of the cabinet remains opposed to transfer, fearful of its international consequences (there are of course those on the right, such as MK Benny Begin — son of Menachem — who oppose it on grounds of principle). But it would appear that Shamir is trying to legitimize the idea and create the kind of cabinet where he can present himself to the world as a moderate when the post war wheeling and dealing begins.

Meanwhile, fear of expulsion remains very strong in the occupied territories. Peace Now said before the war that it had obtained information, through leaks from West Bank settlers, that army units staffed by settlers were prepared to carry out a mass expulsion of West Bank Palestinians.

Israeli entry into the war, or even a unilateral Israeli attack on Iraq should the outcome of the current war stop short of Saddam's overthrow or the destruction of Iraq's military capability, would put the possibility of expulsion firmly on the agenda.

Bush promises everything to everybody

Aside from that nightmare scenario, it is difficult at the moment to discern any clear or coherent imperialist approach to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the fog of rhetoric about the post war order.

Some kind of international conference is hinted at, and the old idea of the emergence of a Palestinian alternative to the PLO is floated, though, outside of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas, hardly an ideal negotiating partner for imperialism or Israel, there are no obvious candidates.

A division of labour appears to be emerging, with the British and French governments making soothing noises to the Arabs while Bush sends various emissaries to Israel to pledge undying support. In any case, it is already clear that Bush has made so many commitments that not all of them can possibly be met. It would, moreover, be staggeringly naive to believe that a victorious imperialism and the US are going to be more generous to the Palestinians than they have in the past.

Whatever happens, the grave dangers facing the Palestinians, in the occupied territories and elsewhere, must be central to the concerns of all those involved in the movement against the Gulf war. ★