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Terrorist violence is not a one-way street: on the Left's stance on Operation Al-Aqsa Flood (Online Article)

Historical Note

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Content

Terrorist violence is not a one-way street: on the Left's stance on Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

In the past week, we have watched the vast majority of the domestic and international Left justify the attack by the far-right Islamist organization Hamas on Israeli civilians. The majority of the left believes that the murders, kidnappings and rapes of hundreds of civilian Israelis and others by Hamas are justified as a desperate reaction to the inhumane oppression experienced by Palestinians in Gaza. As the Chicago chapter of Black Lives Matter very tellingly told us: “When a people have been subject to decades of apartheid and unimaginable violence, their resistance must not be condemned, but understood as a desperate act of self-defense.” [1] The logic of schadenfreude prevails, i.e. the logic of “serves them (Israel) right”. In this paper I analyze and criticize this attitude as an expression of the unprecedented weakness of the contemporary left. The central argument of the text is taken from the insightful essay “History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism” by Marx scholar Moishe Postone[2].

The problem with the left's argument that Hamas' action is a justified reaction to the daily Israeli violence towards Gaza lies precisely in the concept of reaction. Hamas's violent action is not seen as such, that is, as the action of subjects who are accountable for their actions, but as a blind and desperate reaction of tortured, oppressed Palestinians. The Palestinians are not treated as subjects responsible for their actions, like the rest of the world, but as individuals who can only react blindly on the basis of emotion. This perception is problematic, both because it is derogatory towards the Palestinians and because it only recognises the State of Israel and its allies as subjects in the region, which is not the case.

This perception also implies that the only possible political action by Palestinians today is outbreaks of terrorist violence. The left shows little interest in critical analysis of Palestinian factions, regimes and movements such as Hamas, treating instead the Palestinians as a single mass, an oppressed people collectively resisting the occupation. Indicative of this is the collective statement of many groups of

the Greek left that makes no reference to Hamas, and which characterizes the latter's operation as an inevitable “reaction of the Palestinian resistance against the intensification of aggression and settlements by the far-right Netanyahu government.”[3] The suffering and misery of the Palestinians are taken seriously, but their politics, ideologies and class differences are not. For the Left, the various Palestinian factions have neither a political strategy nor a political ideology with a specific class orientation, beyond anger at the enormous oppression they are actually suffering.

In reality, however, despite their constant oppression, the various Palestinian leaders and factions have at times pursued different forms of action and politics, with different ideological and class orientations. Vengeful violence was not always the only and main option. Hamas' deliberate violence against civilians is not a one-way street, but reflects a particular worldview and policy. A worldview and policy that has nothing to do with the ideals and objectives of the Left. Unfortunately, the general concept of resistance under which the Left classifies the Palestinian struggle says nothing about the political character of this resistance.

The result of this attitude of the Left is that the Left is seconding any Palestinian policy and action in relation to Israel, regardless of the political and ideological character of this action. Whereas initially the Left supported anti-colonial and national liberation struggles insofar as they had a progressive tendency, today it supports any form of such struggles, going so far as to turn a blind eye to the reactionary character of Hamas. But thus, in the absence of a critical analysis of reactionary forms of resistance such as Hamas, more progressive forms of resistance and politics that can improve the living conditions of the Palestinians and end their oppression are not highlighted and promoted.

The uncritical support of any form of action by the oppressed is indicative of the political weakness and helplessness of the Left today. The Left does not bother to analyse and try to influence contemporary resistance movements because it has ceased to believe in the possibility of leftist, revolutionary action and leadership in the contemporary world. Having naturalized its inability to influence situations in the present, it is caught by and becomes the tail of any force that opposes and disrupts the existing order, without seeking subjects and forms of struggle that bring closer the socialist transcendence of capitalism. The hypothesis of the radical transformation of society was thus replaced by the vague notion of resistance. Finding itself in a historical situation of unprecedented weakness, the Left is drawn to violence because violence both expresses the rage generated by its helplessness and hides this helplessness behind an explosion of action. Hence, the acceptance of the violence of the oppressed as a cathartic force that comes to break the oppressive and alienating bourgeois legitimacy from the outside, since the Left cannot overcome it from within.

It is necessary to re-constitute an anti-capitalist left and an anti-capitalist workers' movement that will aspire to unite all the individual struggles of the oppressed in a common struggle to overcome capitalism, the bourgeois state and all the forms of unfreedom and oppression that they entail. A left that opposes both the state of Israel, its murderous policies and reactionary forms of action against it. Real peace can only be achieved through class warfare by the workers of all peoples, including Palestinians and Israelis.

Phedias Christodoulides

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[1] https://www.newsweek.com/black-lives-matter-praises-hamas-sparks-backlash-1833630

[2] https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/readings/postonemoishe_historyhelplessness.pdf

[3]

https://xekinima.org/koini-dilosi-organoseon-den-yparchei-eirini-choris-dikaiosyni-allileggyi-stin-palaistini/?fbclid=IwAR1V6693Kabp1kNCggLbKkhTT9V3Ow2mjnwpzIhpI_N7jaOaoF0_IsyQaO0

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