

# Mouvement Communiste

Letter number 29

march 2009

## ISRAELI INVASION OF GAZA : A NEW EPISODE OF WARMONGERING ELECTORALISM

### ▪ **Presentation**

The Israeli response to rocket attacks by Hamas on its territory has resulted in a deluge of fire on the Gaza Strip. On both sides, there has not been any autonomous proletarian reaction against the war, leaving the field clear for both sides to pursue their objectives.

These objectives, for Hamas as for Israel, are identical in nature and complement each other perfectly: resolving internal political contradictions by military operations abroad.

In Israel, with economic difficulties and, above all, a never-ending crisis of the executive after the demise of Ariel Sharon in the background, launching the military operation - prepared, it is true for 8 months, so as to make people forget the failures of the operation in June 2006 against Hezbollah - was a powerful means to strengthen the links between civil society and the State.

In Gaza, Hamas wanted to make people forget their failure to improve the lot of the population, whatever the external causes are, and show that they are not afraid to confront the powerful enemy.

Israel keeps a tight noose around the neck of Gaza by making it an area of segregation that survives only thanks to foreign aid. The sufferings of the poorest Palestinian population are immense and will only get worse after the Israeli army operation. One consequence of this operation is the massive destruction of farms and agricultural enterprises that provided part of the food for residents of the Gaza Strip.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the 22-day Israeli offensive destroyed 80% of the crops (it should be borne in mind that 80% of the Palestinian population, with strong agricultural roots, have a plot of land), 4,100 houses and buildings, some 1,500 factories and workshops. Infrastructure, already in bad shape, including water pipes, the electrical system and the sewage system, was severely hit. More than 4,100 Palestinians have been killed and some 50,000 people are homeless.

The proletarians of Gaza are reduced to silence by the dictatorship of Hamas. For some of them (about 15,000 according to the Israeli Intelligence services), the only possible outlet that appears is to serve as generous informers to the Israeli intelligence services. This explains, by the way, the success of attacks targeted by the army of occupation against several leaders of Hamas.

As for the Israeli proletarians, this time they have not massively expressed their opposition to the operation. The vast majority of the non-Arab population of Israel wants to see an end to Hamas firing on Israeli cities and the risk of suicide bomber attacks. Massive support for the "blitz" action of the army has dug the division with the Israeli Arabs a bit deeper leaving the field open for the Israeli extreme right to portray them as the 5th column of Hamas and to threaten them with expulsion.

More generally, in this area, the distinct objectives of the regional powers - Iran and Syria on one side, Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia on the other - find a common goal in maintaining the oppression that afflicts the Palestinian proletariat.

Finally, the operation in Gaza allowed the Islamic parties to express themselves independently from the parliamentary left, the far left and all their supporters on the streets of European cities for the first time.

Their show of force succeeded in showing that they control a growing number of workers of Arab origin and the Muslim religion. European political Islam deliberately exploited the civilian victims of the Israeli incursion to put forward its own demands, such as the lifting the ban on headscarves, on the basis of an explicit anti-Semitism.

A few dates...

11 November 2004, Arafat dies in Paris.

9 January 2005, Mahmoud Abbas wins the election with 62.5% of the vote and becomes president of the Palestinian Authority. Ahmad Qurei remains prime minister.

12 September 2005, Israel evacuates Gaza completely. The twenty-one settlements are dismantled.

December 2005, Fatah lose major West Bank cities to Hamas during partial municipal elections.

25 January 2006, Hamas win an absolute majority in parliamentary elections, winning 74 of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

19 February, Israel ceases to pay the taxes owed to the PA (VAT and customs duties).

7 April 2006, the European Union suspends financial aid to the Palestinian territories following the installation of Hamas at the head of the PA.

12 July 2006 The Israeli army launches a thirty-four day military campaign against Hezbollah positions in Lebanon following the kidnapping of two of its soldiers.

1 October 2006, armed clashes between the militias of Hamas and Fatah. From the Hamas victory in the elections, the outcome of this battle for power will result in 320 deaths.

14 June 2007, Hamas takes control of the Gaza Strip. Fatah members go to ground. The national unity government falls.

18 June 2007, the US and the EU cease to fund the PA.

28 October, Gaza is under economic blockade by Israel.

19 June 2008, a ceasefire is concluded between Israel and Hamas, under the auspices of Egypt, for a period of six months.

July and August 2008, Hamas accuses Fatah of being the sponsor of a murderous attack. The Islamist militia unleashes a wave of repression against supporters of Fatah. Israel agrees to rescue Fatah supporters by enabling them to find refuge on its soil.

4 November, six Hamas activists are killed following an incursion of the Israeli army in Gaza. Hamas replies with rockets.

14 December 2008, Hamas announces that the truce will not be renewed.

27 December, the Israeli army launches a major offensive on the Gaza Strip, called Operation Hardened Lead. This offensive will result in 1330 deaths on the Palestinian side and 13 on the Israeli side.

- **Recent sources of conflict**

- *Israel : a prolonged crisis of the executive*

Israel experienced a stormy period once again. The Olmert government's credibility was plummeting in the polls while the popularity rating of Benjamin Netanyahu (Likud) continued to rise. The war in Lebanon in the summer of 2006 had left its mark. Tired of suffering from years of rocket attacks on southern cities, at the same time as suicide bombings, many Israelis turned to the hawks of the Likud and the Israeli extreme right. The choice of a new military adventure thus imposed itself for the executive in power to prevent a tidal wave in favour of Benjamin Netanyahu, an objective partially achieved during the recent elections.

While the total disengagement plan from Gaza strip in September 2004 by the Israeli army and the dismantling of settlements were near completion, Ariel Sharon, then Prime Minister, asked President Katsav for the dissolution of parliament and the calling of early elections following the defection of the Labour Party, a member of the coalition government.

Ariel Sharon then resigned from Likud to form his own party, Kadima, in preparation for the early elections in March 2006. He had to do this because a majority of the members of his former party had opposed his plan to withdraw from the Gaza strip as a result of a referendum. The "hawk" was suddenly transformed into a "dove" and his new party intended to follow the roadmap proposed by the "Quartet". After the years of deadlock that followed the Oslo accords, the withdrawal from Gaza seemed to give hope to those wanting to end the war.

A few months later, Ariel Sharon suffered two strokes, the second of which proved to be fatal. From January 2006, he was plunged into a coma. Ehud Olmert became Acting Prime Minister for a hundred days.

This sudden disappearance from the political scene of the butcher of Qibya, Sabra and Shatila created a yawning void that was to cause an institutional crisis. Then the insipid and corrupt Ehud

Olmert took the reins of the party and won the parliamentary elections in March 2006. Full proportional representation required that the winning party - even if a minority - form a coalition government. This often results in fragile heterogeneous majorities.

In the summer of 2006, following the kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers and the death of three more in an ambush, Israel launched an offensive against Lebanon, targeting Hezbollah positions. Israel was surprised by the tenacious resistance that the Lebanese Shiite militia put up, despite the overwhelming military superiority of its army. This attempt to eradicate Hezbollah ended with mixed results. The Olmert government was criticised for missing the target. The Vinograd special commission, named after the presiding judge, identified serious failings of the government in organising the attack and accused Ehud Olmert and Amir Peretz (Labour), then Minister of Defence, of being the two who were most responsible. Cornered, Ehud Olmert was forced to resign from the presidency of the party because of suspicions of corruption conveniently raised against him, and gave way to Tzipora Livni.

Kadima struggled to form a coalition government. The ultra-Orthodox party Shas demanded in exchange for its participation in the coalition, the commitment by Livni not to open negotiations on the status of East Jerusalem with Palestinian officials. In addition, Shas demanded increased funding for family allowances and an increase of \$160 million (+30%) in subsidies for religious schools. Tzipora Livni did not bend to the wishes of Shas but, in the absence of a coalition, the anticipated elections were slated for 10 February 2009.

Olmert remains at the head of an interim government with limited room for manoeuvre. The budget is stalled for lack of a majority vote. Israeli law requires that it must be voted in the Knesset (Parliament) before December 31 this year. This crisis of the executive is bad news for the State of Israel as it considerably reduces its ability to implement measures to counter the effects of the global financial crisis.

Military action against Hamas is rooted in this context. The timing is not insignificant. The space left vacant by Sharon is now a huge arena in which his possible successors fight it out. Given the rise in the polls of Benjamin Netanyahu and Avigdor Lieberman (leader of the far-right Israel Beitenou - "Our Home Israel"), Tzipora Livni of Kadima had to act. The operation in Gaza aimed to use the military defeat of Hamas to prevent the electoral defeat of Kadima. Problems related to the security of southern Israeli towns have also helped to eclipse the social question.

#### ▪ **War against Hamas: no impact on the Israeli economy**

Although today the Israeli economy is more vulnerable – the financial crisis has come along – the operation against Gaza has had no impact on it.

The invasion of Gaza will cost from 25 to 50 million dollars for the state in 2009 (according to *Business Week*, 30 December 2008). Apart from the financing of the military operation itself the government must cover losses suffered by the towns next to the Gaza strip. Emergency aid has been put in place, increasing the bill for the war somewhat.

These unproductive expenditures were therefore added to the costs of counter-cyclical measures to combat the financial crisis. The Treasury aimed to devote 11 billion New Shekels<sup>1</sup> to this task. According to the experts, the budget deficit will be 3.4% of GDP in 2009, its highest level for 5 years, against 1.2% for last year. This means a strong risk of invalidating efforts to reduce the Israeli state debt put in place at the beginning of the century. These efforts brought it down to 75% of GDP in 2008, after it had reached 103% in mid-2002. The wage increases granted in the public sector (1.5% in December 2008 and 2% in 2009) have also put the state finances under pressure.

Contrary to what we might be led to believe, the situation of proletarians in Israel is far from idyllic. According to a report of the National Insurance Institute of November 2008, 1,634,400 people lived below the poverty line in 2007 (23.08% of the population, double the rate for OECD countries). This represented 412,900 families with 773,900 children<sup>2</sup>.

As for insecurity, according to a report by *Latet*<sup>3</sup>:

- 36% of the poor suffer from hunger
- 32% of the poor have had to reduce their spending on food following the deterioration of their

1 The New Shekel was created in 1985 and was worth 1000 old shekels.

2 The poverty line is calculated on the basis of a family of five people whose total income is no more than 1070 Euros. This applies mostly to elderly people and large families - that is, Orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs.

3 An Israeli NGO founded in 1996.

financial situation

- 52% of them only eat twice a day thanks to charity organisations.

#### A quick update on the state of the Israeli economy

Israel experienced an average annual increase of 5% in the GDP for five years (2003-2007). Growth stopped in the third quarter of 2008, and for the whole year was limited to 0.9%. The Israeli economy is strongly linked to that of the United States, the destination of 35% of its exports. The United States has paid to Israel some \$2.5 billion in miscellaneous “aid” in 2007, which is derisory, however, if compared to GDP (206 billion dollars in 2008) and its net decline from 4.1 billion in 2000. The bulk of U.S. financial support (\$ 2.3 billion in 2007) is taken by the military sphere. Industrial production fell by 3.5% from August to October 2008. Consumer spending fell by 4.2% and export growth fell by 13.4%. Unemployment reached 6% in the third quarter and 6.3% in the fourth quarter of 2008. Thousands of workers have been laid off in recent weeks in the high-tech industries, a sector which represents 40% of exports.

Tax revenues fell in the second and third quarter. The purchase of durable goods, including cars - which are very heavily taxed - collapsed resulting in a decrease in sales tax revenue. The Ministry of Finance has sought to limit spending. The large budget surplus in the first quarter of 2008 was reduced to less than \$1.4 billion at the end of November

#### ▪ **Palestine: a chronic crisis of the executive and a permanent economic slump**

With Arafat dead the fight for power in the Palestinian territories between Fatah and Hamas burst out into the open. Initially this was via the ballot boxes, where the Islamist party made a success with the partial municipal elections in the big cities. Then by winning the legislative elections. Rotten with corruption, regarded as the gendarme of Israel, Fatah proved to be unable to meet the elementary needs of the poorest Palestinian populations and very quickly lost any credibility. In Gaza, Hamas drove out *manu militari* the militants of Fatah.

The political force that, until recently, had actively helped Israel in its mortal fight against the PLO<sup>4</sup>, managed to undermine the domination of the clique of friends of Yasser Arafat. Perked up and popular with the most desperate sectors of the population of Gaza, Hamas posed from now on as the only true force of Palestinian “resistance”. A force able, what’s more, to put an end to the permanent plunder and the systematic abuses of power of the Fatah clan. With its many charitable institutions and its broad influence in the Mosques, Hamas wants to also be the only hegemonic political force in the civil society of the Gaza Strip. It’s a kind of religious people-party fighting and blessing at the same time.

Initially, Israel doesn’t care much about this regime change in the poorest and most populated part of the segregated territories of Palestine. Although it has withdrawn from Gaza, it always controls the air, sea and land borders. The takeover by force of Hamas provides it with the pretext to establish an inflexible economic blockade. Crowned absolute master of the foreign trade and financial flows of the Palestinian territories under the terms of the agreement sealed in 1994 between the PLO and Israel on the economic relations between the two entities, the Israeli state suspends the payment of the customs duties and the VAT which are taken on products destined for the Palestinians and which go through the Israeli ports. This loss constitutes more than 60% of the internal resources of the AP, roughly 55 million dollars per month.

Following this, the European Union and the United States also turn off the aid tap. According to the World Bank, international assistance to the segregated Palestinian Territories represents nearly one third of their GDP, which makes them the most subsidized per capita of all third world countries. In 2006, foreign aid to the Territories under Palestinian administration reached \$1.4 billion, corresponding to approximately 56% of the American financing of Israel for that year. The efforts of the western states friendly to Israel are directed at the same time against the threat of a new breakthrough by the Islamist party and of an exceptionally severe fiscal crisis for the Palestinian Authority, a crisis which threatens its very existence as never before.

In 2006, Nigel Robert, regional director of the World Bank stated “the Palestinian Authority is close to bankruptcy”. Starting from January 2006 with the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections, the Palestinian territories once again found themselves in an economic desert. That year the

<sup>4</sup> See the article in the *Wall Street Journal* of 24/1/09, “How Israel has spawned Hamas”.

debt of the PA reached \$1.94 billion, of which \$640 million was owed to banks. At that time it employed 164,700 civil servants, of whom 80,000 were security personnel. These staff represented a monthly cost of \$110 million. The revenue of the PA stood at barely \$25 million. In March 2006 the PA barely raised \$10 million. At that point it owed back wages of \$340 million to its staff while its delayed payment of its suppliers put many private companies in peril. From 2007 the budget of the PA was mostly paid for by the western countries who feared a new landslide for Hamas. This allowed the back wages of civil servants to be paid on 28 February 2007.

During this time when Gaza was a victim of the Israeli embargo commerce was organised. Tunnels were dug towards the Egyptian border terminal of Rafah. The Gaza Strip was thus provided with weapons and various goods. The trade which established itself there is nourished by a rent which became higher as the Israeli blockade intensified. The selling prices of the goods that go through there have never ceased to climb. The masters of the tunnels fill their pockets. The displays of the shops are full but goods remain generally inaccessible to the majority of the poor of Gaza. The food aid from the UNO is more and more sought-after.

A veritable parallel economy has been put in place which reinforces the power of the big clan families who assume the role of protectors of the disinherited, which in return increases their prestige and their domination, symbolic and economic, over the proletarians. According to Claude Collin-Delavaud: *“First of all the chiefs welcome under their roof all the destitute, the orphans, the widows... And then war is a godsend for all kinds of illicit commerce. That goes for the traffic in cigarettes, water, food, as well as arms and drugs. Some families specialise in honour crimes. There exist real mafia organisations and a financial reinforcement of the causes of vendettas only weaken an already toxic system.”*<sup>5</sup>

Dissatisfaction grows. Islamist political groups more radical than Hamas emerge and contest its authority. If these jihadist groups, close to Al Qaeda, are still weak, we can't deny that they have grown over the last ten years. A group like Jaysh al Islam (the army of Islam) allied, we should mention in passing, to one of the most powerful family clans in Gaza, the Dogmush, can already mobilise a militia of close to a thousand men. What's more, they get money from Saudi Arabia and the Emirates who are concerned to counter the influence of Iran and its new ally: Hamas. So Hamas doesn't want to experience the same unpopularity as Fatah. In the past, the adoption of a warlike posture has proved useful in making the population forget their misery. Since 1999, the Palestinian GDP fell by 40%, emphasises the World Bank in a recent report. The Oslo agreements of 1995 are blamed. Rightly because they submit the economy of the territories to a strict commercial and financial Israeli domination and officialise the segregation whose victims are the Palestinian workers. The Islamic party claims to be opposed to these agreements but its fortune, like that of Fatah, was built on them. It would not be in power in Gaza if the agreements of Oslo had not existed.

Playing as usual with this ambiguity, Hamas decided, at the end of 2008, not to renew the six months truce with Israel. It started to attack Israeli cities with missiles again while thinking to benefit from the interregnum in the United States. It was a very hazardous calculation, however. The new US president will not basically change the policy towards Israel, which remains the brother country of the United States in the area. Taking a whole population hostage, Hamas launches the hostilities to preserve its popularity, eradicates more Fatah under cover of the conflict with Israel (during the latest fighting in Gaza, the political police of Hamas continued to torture Fatah militants and execute and injure others in their prisons – a hundred or so – while in the West Bank in Jordan the Fatah police did the same to Hamas militants<sup>6</sup>) and answers “present!” to the calls for war of its financial backers and its weapons providers from Syria and Iran.

#### ▪ **Deterioration of the living conditions of the main part of the Palestinian population**

In April 2008, according to the PCBS<sup>7</sup>, in the territories of the PA:

- 31.5% of workers were full time
- 41.3% of workers were part-time
- 23.7% of workers were unemployed (45% in Gaza)

In 2007, residents living below the poverty line made up 40% of the population of Gaza (19%

<sup>5</sup> Geographer, specialist on the Middle East, interviewed in *Le Figaro-magazine* of 19/1/07.

<sup>6</sup> See the note from ESICS on 29/1/09.

<sup>7</sup> PCBS: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

in the West Bank). The poverty line in the PA territories corresponds to \$232 per month in the West bank and \$116 in Gaza, compared to the same line, with the same criteria, in Israel at \$1070 per month!

Half of Palestinian families are completely dependent on food aid provided by the UN. In Gaza, 1.3 million people (80% of the population) depend on food aid. In the West Bank, there are 700,000 people in this condition.

The World Bank has said that of over 3900 existing industrial establishments employing 35,000 workers, in June 2007, 96% have put the key under the door. In march 2008, there still existed 130 industrial companies hiring 1300 workers.

The 120 Gaza companies in the building sector, dependent on imports of cement and aggregates from Israel, were closed, leaving 42,000 proletarians on the dole. Companies generally operate below capacity.

The blockade has had a negative impact on the transport of furniture, on the agricultural sector and that of clothing. The agricultural export was frozen in January. In 2007, average GDP per capita compared to 1999 was down 27%.

Also in 2007, average GDP per capita in the territories under Palestinian administration was 1178 million, or 27% less than in 1999, although this amount represents an increase of 4.3% compared to 2006.

Palestinian enterprises are facing more difficulties in their loss of international competitiveness, according to a World Bank report. Specialized in products with low technological content and because of their difficult access to necessary funds, Palestinian enterprises have not been able to make the changes necessary to meet the competition on the world market. Investment is virtually nonexistent as is the training of workers.

- **Hamas**

- **An emanation of the Muslim Brotherhood**

Hamas, like the FIS in Algeria, is a force which devotes itself to channelling the legitimate anger of the disinherited Palestinian masses towards reactionary objectives. It acts as an oppressive force controlled by the commercial bourgeois big families from Gaza. The reactionary role of the Egyptian Muslim brothers, from which Hamas is an emanation, has shown itself many times. During the strikes of the textile workers in March-April 2008 they did not support the strikes nor did they call for the general strike on 8 April. Following this they did not support the struggles of peasants against the law on agricultural leases – a law which liquidated the agrarian reforms of the 1950s and allowed the landowners to take back their land to the detriment of the peasants.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood have supported the Palestinian cause since 1936. They fought alongside the Palestinians against the British occupation and the Jewish population who had fled the Nazis and the Slavic pogroms. In 1945, a Palestinian branch of the Brotherhood was officially created but its audience remained marginal in comparison with the popularity of Arab nationalist movements. The creation of the PLO in 1958, headed by Nasser, and the foundation in 1959 of Fatah, the official voice of Palestinian nationalism, by some former Muslim Brothers (including Yasser Arafat himself), pushed the Brotherhood even further into the background.

The Muslim Brothers then gave the highest priority to the re-Islamisation of Palestinian society which they considered to be perverted by the Western model whose representatives were the Jewish occupiers, the secular Palestinian nationalists and the militants of the Marxist left.

There was a new split in the Palestinian Brotherhood in 1980. The youth who wanted to fight the occupiers criticised the movement for its passivity and its wait-and-see attitude. An armed group was created, Islamic Jihad. Despite being Sunnis, their model was the Shiite Iran of Khomeini which they also supported during the war against Sunni Iraq. Their main target: Israeli civilians. On 9 March 1987, the Palestinians of the occupied territories rose up against the occupation. It was the first Intifada (“uprising” in Arabic), the “war of stones”. At this time Islamic Jihad was in decline. The young guard of the Muslim Brotherhood this time wanted to be part of it and asked to participate in armed struggle.

On 9 December 1987, sheikh Yassine founded Hamas (zeal, enthusiasm), an acronym for *Movement of Islamic Resistance*. *The organisation became the armed wing of the Muslim Brotherhood and ended up becoming an independent movement, eclipsing the Brotherhood.*

Hamis wove a network of charity and of social action (hospitals, schools, cultural infrastructure, the University of Gaza...) principally in the refugee camps in Gaza which enabled it to

gain the recognition of the population and to reinforce its image of being incorruptible. The movement was financed by Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

▪ **A nationalist and religious party**

Disappointed by the corruption which infested the Palestinian Authority, represented by Arafat's Fatah, and its inability to found an independent state, the Palestinians progressively turned to Hamas.

Starting in 1993 Hamas threw itself into the armed struggle by means of suicide bombings targeting the civilian population in Israel. The fundamentalists saw the PA as a rump state which was a vassal of Israel. These spectacular attacks gave the impression to Palestinians that, for the first time, Israel was paying in blood on its own territory.

The organisation advocates the creation of a Palestinian state founded on Islam (*dar al-islam*) and Sharia law. All this is enveloped in the mythical vision of what they call the Golden Age of Islam (the era of the Arab occupation of Andalusia) where the non-Muslims (*dhimmis*) lived in "security" on payment of a tax.

*"The Hamas people have nothing to do with the Taliban"* according to Ismael Loubbad, a demographer and economist living in Gaza. *"Even if they use Islam for political ends, they are not concerned with religious discourse. They are rather pragmatic, like the Lebanese Hezbollah"*. This opinion is not ours. Hamas is not a pragmatic party which knows how to adapt itself to the civil society in which it evolves and which is able to react to it. This has no influence on its principles which have remained identical in the decades since it was founded. On the contrary it is opportunist because it knows how to deal with the demands of the moment in the face of obstacles, adapting its discourse without modifying its fundamentals. Once it got into power it began to profoundly transform society, particularly relations between men and women. It benefited from a favourable environment with regards to Islam and Sharia which it perfectly exploited, then, with the decline of Arab nationalism and the advent of the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the revival of religion substituted itself for secular nationalism. Islam became the new instrument through which the Palestinian population recognised itself as a distinct community.

Hamas try to be prudent in the application of Sharia in pursuit of the progressive Islamisation of Palestinian society. Palestinian legislation is partly based on the precepts of Sharia like in the other Arab states, which is an advantage. In effect, polygamy was already recognised, inheritance rights already favoured men, marriages were arranged. In primary school girls and boys were already separated before the Civil Code was drafted. The creation of this only confirmed these things and no one tried to fault it, not even the secular people.

As Abou Eische (professor of law and militant of Fatah in Hebron) explains: *"Hamas is clever enough not to try to impose things by law. [...] To make wearing the veil compulsory, for example, would need a presidential decree. Hamas conducts itself more subtly, by promising subsidies to groups respecting Islamic values"*.

However, Hamas has shown its hard line face many times. During the first Intifada, it imposed the closure of cinemas, theatres and other places of entertainment. Only a few islands such as Ramallah or Naplouse remained open to both sexes and, for example, alcohol was freely on sale.

Published in 1988 by a member of the old guard of the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>8</sup>, the charter of Hamas is a heinous and judeophobic pamphlet which advocates the destruction of the state of Israel and promises to chase the Jews out of Palestine. The vision of the world which is expressed in this founding document takes up a counter-revolutionary tradition, close in many ways to the reactionary thought hostile to the Enlightenment in Europe, which saw in the French and Russian revolutions a plot by Jews and freemasons. But Hamas knows how to be opportunist. Since it is impossible for it to reconquer all of Palestine, it proposes a reprieve of ten or twenty years to Israel, drawing on Koranic law. Now, in ten or twenty years, after the birth of the Islamic Palestinian state which it is fighting for, Hamas will be able to ratify the status quo without any great risk of going back on its decision. In Gaza, Hamas can count on 15,000 fighters of whom only 1000 are hardened soldiers, those of the Ezzedine Al-Qassam brigade. Nevertheless, these forces have shown themselves totally incapable of fighting the Israeli army. Hundreds of kamikazes that Hamas has declared itself ready to launch against the aggressor have either been neutralised or have simply deserted, and only a few abortive attempts have been registered.

The nationalism of Hamas is distinct from the other currents born in the Middle East. It is not

<sup>8</sup> The quotes are taken from the Hamas charter.

for the pan-Arabism of Nasser which was taken up for a long time by the Ba'ath party, that is to say for the creation of pan-Arab secular state. It is no longer, like the Sunnis, for the realisation of a generalised Caliphate across the whole Muslim region, even if it refers to a Golden Age of Muslim expansion. And it isn't for a modern theocratic state like Shiite Iran any more. In fact it confines itself, as indicated in its charter, to the national liberation of Palestine. We can perhaps say that it is for a Caliphate limited to Palestine which is an "*Islamic waqf until Judgement Day*". This nationalism is only the consequence of the religious primacy which guide Hamas ("*nationalism, from the point of view of Islamic Resistance, is an integral part of religious belief*"). So, in this conception, the other Palestinian movements are considered as part of the national movement on condition that they don't ally with "*Crusaders and Communists*" and submit to Islam, therefore to Hamas.

- **The important steps which allowed Hamas to triumph**

The Palestinian resistance founded in 1958 emerged after the Six Day War in June 1967. From the outset, there were three distinct secular components: Fatah (founded in 1959 in Kuwait by Arafat), the PFLP (founded in 1967 by George Habash and Ahmed Jibril) and the DFLP (a split, in 1969, from the PFLP, founded by Nayef Hawatmeh). At that time Palestinian society was composed of Christians, Muslims and atheists, but the religious question did not pose itself. The objective of the DFLP, for example, was the "*creation of a democratic Palestinian state where Arabs and Jews live together in the country in a state without social classes, without oppression, a state which Jews and Arabs are able to develop their national culture*". This party even had contacts with Matzpen, an Israeli internationalist and anti-Zionist extreme left group, as well as with the Black Panthers of Israel<sup>9</sup>.

How therefore could Hamas and its predecessors, insignificant at the time, triumph over the secular Palestinian movements, above all Fatah, in the space of thirty years?

Three important dates emphasise this evolution and the collapse of the latter: 1970, 1982 and 1993-95. They are respectively Black September in Jordan, the Sabra and Shatila massacre in the Lebanon and the Oslo accords (twice).

- **1970**

Palestinian refugees in the camps close to the town of Irbid (the second town of Jordan, in the north) revolted on 17 September 1970, after a succession of skirmishes with the Jordanian Army carried out in August. The Jordanian armed forces, with the support of Israel, repressed them fiercely. The Hashemite hammer also came down hard on the other Palestinian camps in the country. On 27 September, Arafat and the PLO signed a ceasefire agreement with King Hussein and the leaders of the other Arab countries, from Nasser for Egypt to King Faysal for Saudi Arabia via Gaddaffi for Libya. They confirmed the sovereignty of the King over Jordan. The repression caused around 20,000 deaths. Arafat fled to Lebanon.

- **1982**

In the process of the long civil war in the Lebanon (from 1975 to 1990) which opposed, amongst others, Christians against Druze, Israel invaded South Lebanon on 6 June 1982 and placed Beirut in a state of siege. In the suburbs to the west of the city two refugee camps had existed since 1949, Sabra and Shatila, containing 60,000 Palestinians. These people came into direct contact with the Israeli forces. On 14 September 1982, Bashir Gemayel, freshly elected with the support of the Christian Phalange, was assassinated. On 17 September this served as a pretext for Christian Phalangists to enter the camps under the benevolent gaze of the Israeli soldiers commanded by Ariel Sharon.

The reprisals ended in several thousand Palestinians being murdered. The military organisation of the PLO (around 2000 combatants) was dismantled. Arafat and the leadership of the PLO fled Beirut for Tunisia.

- **1993-1995**

The military defeat of the PLO and the abandonment of the Palestinian rebels during the major confrontations with the bourgeois fractions of the region left only one way out for Arafat and his kind,

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<sup>9</sup> The Black Panthers were a radical movement of young North African Jews (mostly in Morocco) which was born in Jerusalem in the poor quarter of Musrara at the beginning of 1971. They opposed the social and economic discrimination that the Ashkenazi Jews imposed on the Sephardic Jews. The movement broke up in 1975.

negotiation with Israel based on the recognition of the enemy state. The PLO gained a rump state where it could fully exercise its Law, its Police, its Repression against Palestinian proletarians. The Organisation abandoned the objective of a right of return for refugees since 1949. The constitution of the Authority, with its bogus frontiers, except for the proletarians of the Territories who worked in Israel, transformed itself into a gigantic tool of segregation for the drained populations.

- **The triumph of Hamas**

The Oslo accords were understood by the later Israeli leaders as a right finally recognised on the international level to completely isolate the dangerous population and workers who had become surplus to requirements after the arrival in Israel of around a million Russian Jews.

On its side the Palestinian Authority was completely mired in corruption, pillage and the frantic enrichment of its new masters. The absolute inability in the management of the ersatz state had as its reason the blank cheque which the Palestinian population had given over the decades to the clique of thieves united around Yasser Arafat<sup>10</sup>.

Incapable of providing themselves with their own independent political movement, the Palestinian proletarians turned, out of conviction or despair, it doesn't matter which, towards those who offered them at the same time a combative pseudo-solution (totally ineffective) and a practical support run over the years via a dense network of charity, medical, educational organisations...

This inability to take their destiny in their own hands led not only to hard defeats and betrayals which the Palestinian proletarians were subjected to but also to something specific to the Arab ruling classes of the region: their chronic inability to generate from the soil of society a modern capitalist society, capable of developing and reinforcing its gravedigger, the working class. The Arab states of this zone essentially founded their despotic power on the rent extorted from commercial capital and prevented the formation of a solid and well adapted bourgeois class.

- ***Brief reminders of the geopolitics of the conflict***

With the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hamas is a military arm of Iran and its instrument of nuisance in the region. Nevertheless, the two movements are not comparable. Hezbollah is a real structured political party, with a solid ideology, comprised of a large apparatus of experienced cadres, the direct or indirect control of unions, associations, chambers of commerce etc., and a military organisation far more capable than Hamas of taking on the Israeli army. With its lucrative oil revenues, Tehran wants to become, to the chagrin of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the regional power along with Israel. Its borders freed from two enemy regimes, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein, Iran wants to become an interlocutor for stability and peace in the region.

The revival of the conflict with Israel is expected to cause problems for the great ally of Israel and the United States in the region, the Egypt of Hosni Mubarak. The Iranian offensive in Lebanon with Hezbollah, which is the cause of the previous incursion of the Israeli army in the south of the country of the cedars, is rooted in the attempt to re-shuffle the cards of influence in the Middle East. This attempt is based on an occasional ally of Iran, Syria, seeking to break the encirclement by America in Iraq and Israel on its southern borders.

However, Egypt does not want an Islamic Emirate on its border, certainly not one so subservient to Iran. The proximity of Hamas to the still active Muslim Brotherhood confirms the Mubarak regime's hostile attitude to the Palestinian Islamic organization. We find here the beginning of an explanation for the closure of the Rafah border terminal. The rest relies on the will, shared by Israel, to prohibit the movement in Egypt of Palestinian labour which is surplus to requirements and potentially politically dangerous.

Jordan, meanwhile, has every interest in seeing the emergence of a Palestinian state, but under the reassuring domination of Fatah. In Cairo as in Amman, they fear the awakening of the Muslim Brotherhood, and, above all, of the Palestinian poor. A majority in the country, they constitute a permanent threat to the Hashemite monarchy which they already fought against in 1970. As discrete as they are efficient, the Jordanian secret services have helped Fatah in its attacks on Hamas militants in the West Bank.

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<sup>10</sup> When we talk about the corruption of the Palestinian Authority it is not just a question of preferential treatment, of nepotism: backhanders, above all its about the gigantic diversion of funds from international aid amounting to \$<sup>900</sup> million by Arafat and his entourage.

▪ ***In Western Europe the Islamists take to the streets: nationalism and religious communities***

Various demonstrations took place during the months of December 2008 and January 2009, formally “to support the Palestinian people against the massive bombing by the Israeli army and the military reoccupation of the Gaza Strip”. These episodes were intended as reactions against the barbarity of war and the massacres of civilian populations, the recurrent outcome of modern warfare.

In reality, these demonstrations were the expression of a relatively underground movement grown up in the shadow of the mosques and on the margins of secular society. This movement advocates the creation of a new community based on the relationship between believers (Umma), the formation of a national and religious identity at a time when the nation is redefined by common religious affiliation. Deprived of any solid material basis in social relations, this illusory community urgently needs scapegoats against which it claims to build itself: "the Jew", the "Zionist", the "impious" ...

The development of the capitalist mode of production dissolves and destroys all remnants of human communities that previously existed. All the old links of solidarity between men are ruthlessly broken, so as to bring forth the individual as seller of his labour power and as a singular citizen facing the state. Equal in rights and duties, he is effectively facing all the other sellers of commodities. This is what Marx calls, in *Capital*: "the Eden of natural rights of man and the citizen." But man is above all a social being, he can not survive without continuous and complex relationships with others. In modern society, these links are organized around wage labour, and in their modern political form, bourgeois democracy.

To perpetuate itself, the system must incorporate this essential dimension of human beings. The individual must certainly present himself at the factory gates and in his relationship to the State. But his complete isolation would deprive capital of the productive power represented by socialization, by man's capacity to cooperate with others. The need to be and to act together draws a response from the ruling classes. They are busy with their endless political, union, civic, religious and other intermediaries to offer the subordinate classes all kinds of collective fake identities. The modern metropolitan tribes multiply, and are formed and reformed by the frenetic pace of flows and reflows of commodities. "Social networks" flourish under the influence of new technologies and the fetishism of commodities. Their primary function is to reweave new links, fill the void left by the missing communities (extended families, tribes, clans, peoples...). These new ephemeral communities act as temporary links suitable for assisting in the reproduction of labour power. These new micro-societies embody and represent, in passing, the negation in acts of the class struggle and the emergence of classist political interests.

The vast majority of this myriad of microstructures of the society of the capital - whose family never stops dying and never stops being reborn - live more or less peacefully under the watchful eye of capital's law enforcement . A minority of them are formed by bearing a hostile posture towards the rest of the civil society of capital. Yet they arise in the interstices of the latter, and often enjoy a great benevolence from the authorities. These days, they often wear the sacred clothing of religions.

Contrary to what some may believe, the religious question has in no way been overcome, much less resolved. One of the current forms of the counter-revolution lies in the resurgence of reactionary and archaic beliefs that go so far as to constitute regimes which are against the modern rationality more in line with capital accumulation. Whether we think about the Iranian regime or that of the Taliban, they are points of reference for whole sectors of the participants in the demonstrations against the latest Israeli blitzkrieg invasion of Gaza....

In the current political situation unfavourable to the proletariat in Europe, the virtual non-existence of any form of independent class organization leaves the field open to the formation of communities of faith. They have a putrid common ideological basis made, at the same time, of anti-Semitism, sexism, exacerbated nationalism, a morbid cult of sacrifice and martyrs, historical revisionism, crudely racist warmongering, the return to the medieval family, denial of social classes and worship of mystical charismatic “fighting” leaders like bin Laden, Nasrallah or Khomeini. All these elements were present in the various demonstrations of political Islam which walked the streets of London, Paris, Brussels, Rome and elsewhere in Europe.

Under the pretext of protest against the war, these parades were in fact support operations to war against Israel and the annihilation of its Jewish population. Under the pretext of the massacres of civilians in a camp, these demonstrations called for the massacre of Jews. In complaining about the

ultra-modern arms of the Israeli occupation army, these demonstrations called for an equally lethal arming of Hamas. All this with contempt for the terrible conditions of survival of the population of Gaza, trapped in a vice by both sides.

These demonstrations were framed in a paramilitary way with a strict organization mosque by mosque. Indoctrinated children followed by women out for a while from their prison home. The men, some dressed as soldiers, walked along while calling loudly for Jihad, Hezbollah and Hamas, to a background of "God is great". The flags and national emblems are flourished against a backdrop of sinister funereal acting. Revisionist and antisemitic slogans such as "Jews = Nazis"; "Gaza = Auschwitz" or "Death to Jews" rang out...

The desire of the Islamist organisers was to convince people that the Israeli state, which carries the specific marks of all capitalist states, and the whole world's Jewish population are one and the same. This is an unacceptable amalgam to all those who have not forgotten the essential contribution of the Jewish workers of Europe to the proletarian, internationalist and revolutionary cause. Of course, nothing remains of this hundred year old experience. However, class struggle did not disappear in Israel. And the Israeli proletarians do not have any interest in the persecution of Palestinians by their state. Their wages, even a small part of them, do not depend on this persecution – contrary to what occurred in old colonial countries. Little qualified or not at all, Palestinian labour does not claim the same jobs as the Jewish or Arab workers of Israel. No economic reason therefore justifies the deep division which exists today between Jewish and Arab proletarians. Only the action of the respective states with their religious supports can lead to the current situation. It is precisely against that the revolutionaries of the whole world must fight.

The demonstrations did not criticise the Arab regimes. Neither Morocco, the historical friend of Israel, nor especially Egypt, which closed its borders to the refugees from Gaza, nor Jordan, Syria or Iran, more or less passive accomplices of the military policy of the State of Israel, suffered insults from the demonstrators. Demonstrators who, by the way, were not too worried about the fate of the inhabitants of the Israeli cities hit by the missiles of Hamas.

These religious community movements are a political phenomenon of the traditional fascist type. Their disturbing character did not fail to spread a deep feeling of unease amongst the ordinary citizens who had the firm intention to protest against the Israeli military aggression. They were taken aback by the explosion in broad daylight of this ideological reality, new to them.

While it is not possible in the space of a text like this to identify and analyse the various nuances of political Islam (the LAE, the PMF, the Zohra Centre, the Shiite Party of France and so on for the political groups and parties; Tariq Ramadan and Soheib Bencheik, as well as Malek Chebel, for the intellectuals<sup>11</sup>), we think that beyond the nuances, and even the opposition between partisans of tradition (*salaf*) and those of the modernisation of Islam, they share a common basis, the primacy of religion.

There exists a political Islam in the same way as there exists a political Christianity in certain Western countries, which includes, outside the Church itself, mass political parties, political sects and Opus Dei. By basing itself on the need to palliate the miseries endured in capitalist society and by offering an explanation of the world, as well as a radiant future in the hereafter, Islam acts like any religion.

As Marx said (in the introduction to the "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right"):  
*"Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."*

But political Islam also offers something in the here and now to proletarians. Because it is non-revolutionary it can propose to "reform" everyday life against the "values" of the West. In developing itself, in taking root, political and combatant Islam shares several essential characteristics with the historical fascist movement:

- an exacerbated nationalism;
- a mass organisation subservient to a charismatic leader;
- a national community based on "race", religion or nationality (or several of these ingredients together);
- the persecution of scapegoats who are supposed to make the complete formation of the community impossible;

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<sup>11</sup> Soheib Bencheik, the mufti of Marseilles, is an advocate of "open and secular Islam". Malek Chebel is an academic writer in France, the Maghreb and the US, a partisan of "modern Islam".

- a military apparatus side by side with electoral and parliamentary functions;
- criticism of some aspects of capitalism without, however, calling exploitation into question;
- the cult of strength, action and spilled blood;
- a reactionary vision of the role of women based on the return to the traditional patriarchal family;
- finally, viscerally anti-worker and counter-revolutionary politics.

These religious communitarian resurgences act like a party of order and the defence of tradition by all means (see the European Arab League). Reactionaries and interclassists, they must, in the eyes of their respective leaders, fight the rest of an impious society by all means.

Micro-societies in charge of the various aspects of the daily life, in return, they impose on their members an absolute conformity to the values and established rituals (veils, beards, burka...). Up to now, these communities remained discrete and not very visible, confining themselves to trying to control their respective ghettos. With their massive appearance in the demonstrations – at least 20,000 people in Brussels on January 11; several thousands in France – we can see their first, great attempt to present themselves as a party, an acting political power able to take over the streets.

Leftists and other secular pro-Islamist politicians, like *Respect*<sup>12</sup> in the United Kingdom or the PTB (Belgian Workers Party) in Belgium (this Stalinist party created an electoral trust with the LAE, in Antwerp), support and approve these fascistic excrescences for purely electoral and populist reasons. They apply the old Trotskyist, Stalinist and Maoist tactic which justifies support for the weakest capitalist countries, because they are seen as a lesser evil than the imperialist ogre<sup>13</sup>. In this way, they hide the fact that imperial politics is a constant of all capitalist states, weak or strong.

The states which are used as references by political and combatant Islam, here and abroad, are the first to exterminate any secular force, especially when it defines itself as Marxist, revolutionary or even only on the left. It is enough to think of the war without mercy between Hamas and Fatah – including during the Israeli offensive – or of the extermination of all the progressive forces by the Iranian theocratic state.

Of course, the radical critique of the latest episodes in the life of political and combatant Islam should not make us forget that the pro-Israeli demonstrations, although definitely less well attended, also sought to affirm the supremacy of a community just as illusory, that of the Jews, and of a Zionist nationalism that claims that all the Jews in the world can be identified with the state of Israel. Thus, what goes for the partisans of political Islam applies just as much to the supporters of the State of Israel.

The savage will of these two enemy camps to export the Palestine conflict to other countries so as to create, on this basis, micro-societies without a true material base, but controlled by a strict ideological domination, causes a final negative effect. The aggressive polarisation of minority fictitious communities causes the very large majority of the population known as indigenous to be pushed even more into the arms of the democratic and allegedly secular states of the strongest capitalist countries. Anti-foreigner racism regains ground. These events underline the dramatic absence of any independent proletarian action. We are forced to admit that the exploited class remains subjected to interests which are not its own. Some of its fractions dissolve into antiquated illusory communities that embody the negation their class interests. Where the bearded appears, the proletarian disappears.

#### ▪ ***Fighting divisions within the proletarian camp***

As at the time of the second Intifada, it is more than ever necessary to encourage and support any form of desertion and defeatism within the two camps, while criticizing false solutions based on democratic and pacifist illusions. Opposition to the occupation and the segregation of Palestinians by the state of Israel is the other point of reference enabling workers to impose their own autonomous policy in the area. For that purpose, it is essential to denounce and banish definitively any anti-proletarian policy and mode of struggle. The launching of rockets as much as the recent indiscriminate attacks prevent the birth of a broad front opposed to the war in Israel. These acts, as well as the policy

12 *Respect*, founded in January 2004 (full name: “Respect – The Unity Coalition”), was a grouping of various far left organisations, mostly the Trotskyist SWP, Islamist groups, notably the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), and the eminent ex-Labour MP George Galloway, well-known for having been financed over the years by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Beside a classic programme of the left (defence of public services, nationalisation, opposition to the EU etc.) this party aligned itself with strongly pro-Palestinian positions and made no critique of religion. It abandoned any defence of the rights of women and gay people so as to seduce the “Muslim” electorate.

13 Well, apart from Russia in the case of Georgia or China in the case of Tibet!

which inspires them, serve only the interests of the bourgeoisies in conflict and each day divide the proletarians of the two camps even more.

The resumption of class struggle is more than ever necessary to end the sacrifice of masses of proletarians for interests opposed to theirs. It is only when exploited Palestinians sweep away the nationalists and the mullahs who act in the name of their dominant classes and their Israeli class brothers have done the same that the war, discrimination and exploitation will take any great steps back. Such an assumption, for the time being, sounds like a pious vow. However, it constitutes the only realistic way out of the confrontation without end between the two peoples, whose aim is nothing other than to maintain the power of the respective dominant classes.

If we look at the past, attempts at political unification of the proletarians of the two camps are not lacking. In the `70s, the Black Panthers (movement of young Jews from North Africa) were opposed to the Israeli state while moving toward their Palestinian brothers. In 1982, more than 300,000 peace-loving Israelis did not hesitate to express their anger at the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, perpetrated by Christian Phalanges lead by Sharon the butcher. In 2002, several hundred soldiers and Israeli reserve officers deserted while refusing to carry out operations of alleged pacification against Palestinian civilians. Apart from developments of this nature, there will only be, for the exploited of the area, whoever they are, blood and grapeshot.

In November 2002, in the letter n°5 "Palestine: two states against the proletariat" written after the second Intifada, we declared "our definite opposition to any bourgeois solution to the social and civil war in Palestine which including the formation of a bi-national state (a highly improbable result given the depth of divisions between the two people) or of two States (the most probable result). Nevertheless, in the absence of the emergence of a unified proletarian force, we can't hide the fact that the end of hostilities can help the birth of a more determined class struggle in both camps some other time." There is no reason to change this view today.

Bruxelles-Paris, 21 mach 2009

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