

## **Article published by the CWI – 21 September 1993**

### **The Oslo Accords**

5.1. The deal has been greeted with great enthusiasm and euphoria on both sides of the national divide. This is no surprise and is understandable; thousands of Palestinians have sacrificed their lives in the struggle for liberation, and increasing numbers of Israeli workers have needlessly died in pursuit of their ruling class' aim to subjugate the Palestinian masses. The majority of workers and youth on both sides of the divide see the deal as a major step towards peace. As socialists we share and echo this desire for an end to bloodshed. However, nothing would be worse than reinforcing illusions among Israelis and Palestinians that will shortly be dashed against the rock of reality.

### **What processes have lead to the deal?**

5.2. In the past socialists have explained that the Middle East was a region of vital strategic and economic importance to the two superpowers, mainly due to its oil supplies. There was a constant struggle between US imperialism and the USSR to compete for strategic supremacy in the area.

5.3. Having cynically used the wish of the Jews for a homeland to escape the holocaust and to create a bridgehead for themselves, Western imperialism has carried out a policy of divide and rule in the region ever since. Despite numerous UN resolutions and criticism of the Israeli government's more outrageous acts of oppression against the Palestinians, imperialism has never been prepared to concede genuine Palestinian national liberation. They feared that the revolutionary aspirations of the Palestinian masses could not be satisfied under an independent state on the basis of capitalism. The fear was that the consequences would be a revolutionary upsurge amongst the Palestinians expressed through the PLO, which in all probability would result in the formation of a state looking to the Stalinist bloc for support. Such a development would have destabilise the region and threaten the fundamental interests of imperialism. .

### **What has changed to make these momentous events possible?**

5.4. Previously the signing of a peace accord between the Israeli government and the PLO would have appeared completely unthinkable.

5.5. The collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union 1989-90 has had a huge effect on world relations, including the situation in the Middle East. Faced with internal crisis the Soviet Union withdrew political and financial support, including favourable trading agreements, from its client states in the Middle East. The same applied to the PLO as well.

5.6. In this power vacuum, regimes previously hostile to imperialism were forced to look to the West to guarantee their stability. This was graphically shown in the Gulf

War where only the PLO, owing to mass pressure from below, came out in support of Iraq.

- 5.7. While trumpeting its victory during the Gulf war, US imperialism's experience during this conflict demonstrated the extreme instability of the region. It realised the military conflict had solved none of the fundamental problems in the region. Since then US imperialism has viewed the growth in support for Hamas with alarm. A political settlement in the region was seen as a way of cutting across the growth in support for Islamic fundamentalist ideas amongst the Arab masses, especially the youth. Western imperialism therefore still fears the revolutionary potential of the Palestinian masses. They hope to split the Palestinian masses by using the PLO leadership to implement deal.
- 5.8. US imperialism's economic problems and its growing international responsibilities as the world's major military superpower, have meant that it has increasingly looked to a regional political solution as a basis of reducing its large commitment of aid to the area, especially to Egypt and Israel.
- 5.9. The collapse of Stalinism has led to a realignment of forces within the Middle East. In general the majority of Arab states, faced with domestic economic crisis and political instability, have moved into the orbit of influence of US imperialism. All the Arab regimes previously in conflict with Israel, apart from Iran and Iraq, are moving towards signing peace accords. In doing so they hope to ingratiate themselves to Western capitalist powers, leading to political and economic support for their regimes.
- 5.10. It was regional and international factors which pushed the Israeli ruling class into doing what was previously unthinkable and signing a provisional agreement with the PLO.
- 5.11. The most far-sighted sections of the Israeli ruling class realised that the Intifada has had a huge effect on Israeli society. They realise it is impossible to crush this six year long uprising by the Palestinian people militarily. Moreover, this realisation, which had begun to take root among wider sections of the Israeli working class, led to an underlying polarisation within Israeli society questioning the idea of a "Greater Israel". Coupled with a war-weariness exacerbated by the Gulf war, a political solution was increasingly sought for. This was underpinned by a feeling that Israel had no strategic advantage in maintaining its occupation of the Gaza, especially since the IDF faced the most implacable opposition in this part of the occupied territories. It was for this reason that the Israeli government felt confident that proposing self-rule for the Gaza would not provoke major opposition from its population. It used the wish of wide sections of the Israeli working class for a lasting peace to end the seemingly never-ending cycle of violence, as a social battering ram against the reactionary Jewish settlers who totally opposed any concessions to the Palestinians.
- 5.12. In a sense the Gulf war also exposed the promises of the Zionist Israeli capitalist class: that the Israeli people could be guaranteed that the IDF would protect them

from Arab attack. The scud missiles landing on Israeli soil shattered this illusion. While the Israeli bourgeois were convinced that they could win any confrontation with the Arab states in a conventional war, they understood that the increasing nuclearisation of the Middle East could militarily change the balance of forces. This provided further impetus for a political settlement.

5.13. The Israeli ruling class has also realised that since the Gulf war, US imperialism has been looking for other regimes to rest on in order to try to reduce tension in the region. The continuation of the Intifada also laid the basis of a greater questioning, by more advanced layers of the US working class, of the role of US imperialism in supporting a regime that oppressed the Palestinians.

5.14. The long-term difficulties of the Israeli economy, despite its recent upturn, also pushed the Israeli ruling class in the direction of an agreement. For decades the Zionist capitalist governments have been able to guarantee a certain level of health care, education and job security for the Israeli working class. However, the world recession, increasing competition, and the growth of a corrupt and inefficient bureaucracy has led to the public sector of the economy being unable to guarantee the living standards of the Israeli workers.

5.15. On top of this has been the arrival of 400,000 Soviet Jews. Initially seen as vital ammunition in the demographic battle against the growing Palestinian population, the Soviet Jews have become a factor of instability. These immigrants in general are economic refugees fleeing the instability that followed the collapse of Stalinism. Most of them were not committed Zionists and were well-trained professionals who on arrival faced either unemployment or what they saw as menial jobs.

5.16. There is no doubt that significant sections of the Israeli capitalist class also see the peace settlement as a means of increasing their profits through the ending of the Arab boycott and through the economic domination of whatever new industry develops in the occupied territories.

5.17. The collapse in support for the PLO in the occupied territories also brought a change in the thinking of the Israeli ruling class. The PLO and its support amongst the Palestinian masses was seen in the past as the main enemy of Israeli capitalism. The recent mushrooming support for groups, such as Hamas, among the Palestinians was seen as a much greater threat, especially given their implacable opposition to Western imperialism and the existence of the Israeli state. These groups have attracted some of the most conscious revolutionary youth, in the absence of any alternative.

5.18. The signing of the agreement by the Israeli ruling class acted to rescue the PLO leadership from certain political obscurity and was seen as a way of beheading the Intifada through marginalising the support of Hamas. The Israeli ruling class used the weakness of the PLO leadership to sign a deal which granted concessions which were small enough not to provoke a generalised revolt among Israeli Jews, but with

enough promises of future concessions for the Palestinians to ensure that Arafat could find points of support in the occupied territories.

- 5.19. Arafat and those who supported him in the PLO leadership were forced into a deal in a desperate struggle for survival. This can be the only explanation for Arafat signing a deal, since he described concessions previously offered by the Israeli ruling class as "nothing more than a Palestinian bantustan" The crisis in the PLO leadership, which became especially sharp just before the signing of the deal, is a direct result of their mistaken political approach in the past. The collapse of Stalinism has resulted in the growth of the pro-capitalist wing inside the PLO leadership.
- 5.20. Their policy was a mixture of diplomatic pressure on the Arab regimes and Western imperialism to solve the Palestinian question, and organising armed attacks on Israeli targets. They relegated the Palestinian masses to the role of onlookers on the one hand and rested on the political and financial support of reactionary Arab regimes on the other. The PLO leadership in exile were shocked by the explosion of the Intifada and tried to control the movement from exile without giving full logistical support to the uprising.
- 5.21. These Arab regimes had no real interest in Palestinian national liberation – they merely used the mantle of fighting for Palestinian rights as a radical cover in the eyes of their own masses. With the collapse of Stalinism these regimes found even verbal support for an uncompromising struggle for Palestinian statehood a barrier to obtaining support from US imperialism.
- 5.22. The support of the Palestinian masses for Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war, as a result of his uncompromising stand against imperialism, meant that the PLO leadership had no alternative but to back Iraq in this, conflict. After the war the crisis, caused by a lack of a credible strategy from the PLO leadership, was corresponded by the cutting of financial support from the Gulf States. This brought all the accumulated political contradictions within the PLO to the surface and threatened to shatter it as a political force.
- 5.23. The PLO leadership hope to rely on their previous authority and the war-weariness that exists among older sections of the Palestinian masses to sell the deal in the occupied territories. Arafat and the PLO leadership hope to rescue themselves from oblivion and to portray themselves once again as the leaders of the Palestinian masses. This is not for sentimental reasons; they see the agreement as a way of guaranteeing themselves careers, with accompanying privileges, as part of the new Palestinian self-governing administration.

### **Our attitude to the deal?**

- 5.24. The consistent analysis of the CWI has been that capitalism has been unable to solve the social and economic problems, as well as the national question in the Middle East, and has in fact exacerbated the situation greatly. We believe that the national aspirations of the Palestinians and the fear that the Israeli working class

have for their security can only be answered on the basis of the overthrow of the reactionary Arab regimes and the capitalist Israeli state.

- 5.25. Through the revolutionary struggle this would require, the basis for a democratic socialist federation of the Middle East could be built. A revolutionary struggle would also act to raise the consciousness of the Palestinian masses and the Israeli working class to demonstrate that the real enemy was Zionist Israeli capitalism and the reactionary Arab regimes. It would pose sharply to the most conscious Jewish workers and youth that they have no common interests with Zionist Israeli capitalism, and to remain in the camp of their ruling class will result in repeated bloody confrontations. This programme will initially make greater gains among the Palestinian masses; but a dear revolutionary appeal to Israeli workers, which guarantees their rights in a socialist Middle East in the long term, could act to win sections of them over, or at the very least neutralise their support for Zionist Israeli capitalism.
- 5.26. The enormous resources of the region, now wasted on war and the financing of the corrupt feudal and capitalist elite, would also provide the basis for answering the problems created by the national question.
- 5.27. Does the present agreement mean that we were mistaken and that because of changed conditions, capitalism and the reactionary Arab regimes can provide a solution to the national question? Can the agreement even ameliorate the tension in the region?
- 5.28. In Israel the agreement was greeted with huge support. Israeli workers and young people saw the agreement as the first step to lasting peace in the Middle East. The enormous weight of the constant threat of war and the continuing Intifada appear to be lifted. The right wing reactionary settlers have been marginalised for the moment. In general there appears to be an unstoppable momentum, in the direction of a final settlement. Even among those Israeli workers who have questions about giving land for peace the feeling is that, with the prospect of lasting peace, the problems in the occupied territories will no longer be of concern to Israel and will have to be dealt with by the Palestinians.
- 5.29. It is also clear that the majority of Palestinians in the occupied territories now support the settlement. The main feeling appears to be: "Give the settlement a chance, maybe we will get a state". This is as a result of a feeling of tiredness among the older sections of the population as a result of six years of Intifada.
- 5.30. The euphoria is understandable after decades of conflict. However, we have to look beyond this and see whether the deal can be implemented and if it will result in the national liberation of the Palestinian masses, thus solving the contradictions caused by the national question.
- 5.31. If it were possible for the question of Palestinian statehood to be solved through step-by-step concessions, even if through negotiations between imperialism, the reactionary Arab leaders, the PLO, and the Israeli ruling class, then it would get

widespread and lasting support. If it began to solve the problems of the region such a settlement would make our work far easier in that the complication caused by the national question would no longer exist.

- 5.32. Looking in detail at the agreement and taking into account the consciousness of sections of the Palestinian masses, unfortunately this outcome seems to be the least likely.
- 5.33. The deal in essence gives limited aspects of self-rule in Parts of the occupied territories with the promise of future status to be negotiated. Although the Israeli army will be withdrawn to barracks, it will still have access and jurisdiction on the roads in the occupied territories. All indications are that the Israeli police force will remain in place to be joined by the infamous border guards. The Palestinian Police Force (PPF) will not have jurisdiction over the settlements. The questions of Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, and the borders are all to be delayed until the start of negotiations on permanent status.
- 5.34. It is clear that these concessions do not come anywhere near granting Palestinian national Liberation. There are absolutely no commitments on political prisoners while the Palestinian refugees from 1948 will continue rotting in the refugee camps around the Middle East. The fact that future negotiations will discuss the possibility of the right of return of the 1967 refugees represents a cynical attempt to split the Palestinian population and the refugees.
- 5.35. What will the role of the PPF be? Despite the large support for the deal among the Palestinians, it is clear that there is a significant minority who are completely opposed to the deal and see the actions of the PLO leadership as selling out the struggle for Palestinian national liberation for their own ends. These youth will conduct a struggle of bitter opposition to the deal. It is, obvious that the opposition to the agreement has occupied the minds of the PLO leadership, Western imperialism, and the Israeli bourgeois from the very beginning of the negotiations.
- 5.36. As early as November 1992 a meeting took place between former members of Mossad and representatives of the PLO's internal security service to discuss "Internal security and the role of the Palestinian police force in the interim period". The Israeli representatives described the attitude of the Palestinians as "professional and business-like".
- 5.37. Throughout the declaration of principles signed by the PLO and the Israeli government there are constant references to the role of the PPF in "guaranteeing public order and internal security" and the need for "a strong police force". These are clear statements that there will be opposition to the deal and that the role of the PPF will be to crush such opposition. This has been confirmed by Abu Bassam Sharif who has recently said: "If there is opposition we will crush their heads". The closer self-administration has come the more this issue has dominated the minds of the PLO leaders. That is why PLO estimates of the numbers required for the PPF have recently increased – from 17,000 to 30,000.

- 5.38. More worryingly, in article XIII, the agreement states: "Further redeployments to specified locations will be gradually implemented commensurate with the assumption of responsibility for public order and internal security by the Palestinian police force..." This means that the IDF will only withdraw if the Israeli bourgeois are satisfied that the PPF is clearing out opposition. What they will do if this is not done successfully is not stated.
- 5.39. The new PLO administration will have a weak basis of support in the territories. All it will be able to rely on is the hope among Palestinians that the agreement is the first step to statehood. Once the PLO administration is in place the euphoria that greeted the agreement will have to be backed up with improvements to match the hopes that the masses have. The PLO leadership will be involved in a desperate race against time. It is for this reason that the PPF will play a very important role in protecting the continued rule of the new administration, in the period when the PLO is attempting to build social forces on which to rest
- 5.40. Palestinian youth who have no illusions in the deal will correctly portray the PPF as new oppressors to replace the old ones of the IDF. They will point out the failure of the PLO to give full logistical support to the Intifada as well as the lack of democracy in the PLO and the opulent, corrupt lifestyles of their former leaders in exile. The fact that Arafat has already purchased a home for \$3 million will not go unnoticed in the slums and open sewers of Gaza,
- 5.41. That is why the PLO leadership have made huge efforts to obtain promises of aid to the Gaza and West Bank. Western capitalist powers have offered \$2 billion as a new "Marshall aid" plan. On the basis of improvement-its in infrastructure and social welfare the new PLO administration hope to undercut the support of the radical Islamic fundamentalist groups. It is likely that they will gain certain points of support as a result. The PLO leadership realise the huge strains they will be put under – leading PLO economists have said that they will need at least \$13 billion – to guarantee stability. The \$2 billion promised will only deal with the basic question of infrastructure. It does not take into account the huge economic strains that the administration will be under if even limited numbers of the 1967 refugees are given the right to return.
- 5.42. "Marshall aid" was promised in Eastern Europe. Only a fraction of the promised aid has been given mainly because the political instability frightened away capitalist investors and the new regimes of Eastern Europe were not able to fulfil the conditions stipulated by the IMF and World Bank. It is true that the occupied territories are a much smaller area and so even small amounts of aid will have an effect. But the point still applies – for a new "Marshall aid" to work in the long run the situation will have to be a politically stable. This is extremely unlikely.
- 5.43. In our arguments against those who supported the idea that capitalism could provide a Palestinian state the CWI has stated that Palestinians do not want a state just for democratic rights – they want decent housing, jobs and education. However,

this is just one side of the question. The decades long struggle of the Palestinian masses and their oppression by the Arab regimes and Israeli capitalism has left a burning desire for national liberation which will not be bought off merely by better living conditions.

- 5.44. The funding to the occupied territories will be used to create a new comprador Palestinian bourgeois. Through these representatives, Israeli capitalism and the Arab regimes will continue their economic exploitation of the Palestinian masses. There will be a polarisation of economic wealth in the territories. The PLO administration will apply the funding in a partisan manner. Aid will be given in return for political support..
- 5.45. However, this will not stop the Palestinian youth mobilising against the agreement that will portray this defection as yet another section of the leadership who are not prepared to fight for the Palestinians.
- 5.46. There are many obstacles in the way of further concessions. The Israeli ruling class will find it much more difficult to deal with the 150-170 000 settlers in the Golan and West Bank. Their idea of a Palestinian state in confederation with Jordan is yet another attempts to shift the responsibility for controlling the Palestinian masses to another regime. The Jordanian regime is extremely unlikely to accept this proposal – they have previous experience on the destabilising effect, which large numbers of Palestinians within their borders can have, as the revolutionary uprising in 1970 showed. Palestinians already form a majority of the Jordanian population, and the regime already faces destabilisation caused by the economic and social crisis that has led to the growth in radical Islamic fundamentalism
- 5.47. In the short term there could be big clashes between the PPF and PLO supporters and those who oppose the deal. These could represent elements of civil war in the situation. The shooting of Hezbollah supporters in the Lebanese refugee camps by PLO militias for demonstrating against the deal shows what is likely to happen at some stage in the occupied territories. Over the long term the deal could be undermined by an open conflict among the Palestinians.
- 5.48. These events will not be confined to Gaza and the West Bank. Events in the occupied territories will have a direct effect in Israel and will not merely be a problem for the PLO administration to deal with, as some Israeli commentators claim. Palestinian youth will also direct their anger against those they see are the political allies of the new administration – Israel and the West. Unfortunately, given the lack of a revolutionary alternative, the youth will turn to the radical Islamic groups and use the tactics of bombings and killings in Israel proper.
- 5.49. While the right in Israel is now on the defensive, they will use these attacks to mobilise opposition against further concessions. They will use the settlers in the Golan and West Bank as the basis for their campaign. While there is huge support for the settlement now, there are deep-rooted psychological fears among the Israeli working class which the right will use to destabilise the situation. In the likelihood of

Palestinian attacks against Israeli targets the tendency will be for the support for further concessions to be undermined and for the Israeli government to roll back the concessions that have been made already.

- 5.50. Looking at all the factors and processes involved therefore, this agreement although it has provided minimum concessions to the Palestinians, will break down over the longer period. Capitalism is still incapable answering the aspirations of the Palestinians, both in the occupied territories and the Diaspora. It is using the agreement to split the Palestinians, to delay further conflict. The agreement will be broken by the inability of its co-signers to solve the contradictions of the region.
- 5.51. Among some on the left the argument has been raised that even if the agreement is not going to give Palestinian statehood, then it will grant a period of peace in the region. They have also stated that at least the IDF will be withdrawn to barracks.
- 5.52. The agreement may provide a period of quiet although this is not certain. But any limited stability will be based on the false promise, propagated by Israel and the PLO, that the deal will provide something, which cannot not be given – statehood. This being done or the basis of the PLO's betrayal of the masses. The consequence will be to further complicate the situation by dividing the Palestinians leading to civil war, and further support for Islamic fundamentalist ideas. These complications which are maturing beneath the wave of euphoria will explode to the surface later on with horrific consequences.
- 5.53. We fully support the withdrawal of the IDF to barracks. This is a by-product of the Intifada, rather than a cosy agreement between the Israeli ruling class and the PLO. However, we go further and demand the complete withdrawal of all IDF troops from the occupied territories. The CWI points out that under certain circumstances the processes which led to the IDF being withdrawn to barracks could turn into their opposite and lead to their deployment once again.
- 5.54. It would be wrong to give support to the deal, even critically, because it will give rise to the illusion, under the existing conditions of euphoria, that all problems have been solved. Our explanation that this deal is a poisoned chalice for the Palestinian masses, and will break down, does not mean that somehow we support the status quo.
- 5.55. The deal will break down because capitalism cannot provide what the Palestinians want. Our programme is for a struggle for a socialist confederation of the Middle East. This means we stand unequivocally for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories, the overthrow of the reactionary Arab regimes and the Israeli capitalist state.