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A contribution to the critical review of our approach to the national question in Palestine-Israel

Introduction

- 4.1. Any critical appraisal of our work and analysis of the national question in Palestine-Israel must confront a hard truth: throughout its history the CWI, later ISA, has not been able to develop a meaningful foothold in Palestine specifically, and in Arab-majority societies more generally. Notwithstanding occasional recruits of a Palestinian background within the so-called Green Line, unsuccessful efforts to build in Lebanon and Egypt, and very limited results in Tunisia, our political current's practical experience of engagement with the societies most intimately bound to the Palestinian struggle has been, at best, minimal.
- 4.2. This absence of direct immersion in the lived experiences and struggles of the Palestinian masses, as well as in communities whose political, cultural, historical, religious and linguistic identities are deeply intertwined with the Palestinian question, has been and remains a major shortcoming. A sober acknowledgement of this fact, coupled with an open and critical examination of its causes, consequences, and of the steps required to overcome it, is an inescapable part of our review.
- 4.3. The initial geographical location and national background behind the birth of any Marxist group necessarily contains 'accidental' factors. Yet the persistence of this particular weakness over decades — surviving even the most comprehensive and largest revolutionary upheavals of the post-Stalinist era, which unfolded in that very region — cannot be attributed to accident alone.
- 4.4. This document does not claim to offer an exhaustive analysis of the reasons behind this situation, which are undoubtedly multiple and complex, comprising both objective and subjective reasons, including individual mistakes —and as someone who oversaw the work in Tunisia since its inception, it would be disingenuous to not include my own mistakes in this reckoning.
- 4.5. Equally disingenuous would be to underestimate the objective difficulties of the task at hand, especially in periods of deep mutual animosity between the national communities. In this respect, the Second Intifada in the early 2000's —which led to a strengthening of the Israeli right and deepened both the psychological and physical separation between the two societies, including by further insulating Israeli Jews from the realities of occupation—, and even more so the 15 months-long genocide carried out from October 2023 onwards —which has accelerated the Israeli regime's shift toward outright eliminationist policies—, have marked two historical turning points.

- 4.6. It is also true, of course, that the composition of an organization does not mechanically reflect nor determine its political trajectory. However, a prolonged inability to address such imbalances can both indicate and reinforce deeper weaknesses in political orientation. This is why the Third International under Lenin insisted on the necessity for Communists to make special efforts to integrate colonized people into their ranks and foster revolutionary leadership among them.
- 4.7. In a situation of entrenched national oppression like in Palestine-Israel, it would be unreasonable to assume that a Marxist organisation that has evolved primarily within the Israeli-Jewish milieu for such a long time —without sustained, organic ties to the lived realities and moods of the oppressed nation— would not have been affected, even subtly, by this imbalance, in its internal culture and practices, and in the articulation of its program.
- 4.8. This question extends beyond Israel itself, in two crucial respects. On the one hand, the section has served as the main regional point of reference, source of analysis, and body of experience for the entire International on the national question in Palestine-Israel for years. This has inevitably left an imprint on successive generations of members and cadres across the CWI/ISA; certain “reflexes”, emphases, and modes of reasoning would have inevitably influenced them to a degree or another.
- 4.9. On the other hand, the role of the international leadership itself must be accounted for. This not only includes its role in having shaped the historical approach towards the conflict (hence the attempt, in the present document, to delve into some of our historical material) but also its relationship with the section as it developed.
- 4.10. My insight into the latter is limited, hence requires critical scrutiny; but based on my nine years working for the International Secretariat of the CWI (between 2009 and 2018), this relationship seems to have been often marked by excessive deference, which allowed a narrow political outlook for the development of our work in the region to persist largely unchallenged. During the later period of the CWI, this often took the form of uncritical glorification of the section’s work; in the final year of ISA, this logic reached its most absurd expression in the caricatural parroting of the section’s own arguments by the majority bloc for purely factional purposes.
- 4.11. As it stands, parallels between the approaches of both organisations can hardly be avoided. To name but one obvious example, the CWI and the ISA stand as among the very few trends on the international left, and within the Gaza solidarity movement as a whole, that have refused to recognize the genocide for what it is. It is an indisputable fact that in ISA’s case, the leadership of the section was instrumental in this failure. This included, in April 2024, the

drafting of a 10,000-word document, a central aim of which was to rationalize the non-use of the term.

- 4.12. The designation of what happened in Gaza as an "Israel-Gaza war" by the CWI, and at one point, as a "proxy war" by ISA, both obscured the asymmetry of power and the colonial dimension of the conflict. Likewise, slogans used by some of our then-sections, such as the "Stop the war – Solidarity with Palestinian and Israeli working people" banners displayed by Socialist Alternative in the USA, reinforced a framework that falsely equated the two sides, as if this were a war between rival imperialist actors. Our former French section, Gauche Révolutionnaire, even published material featuring an image of a handshake—one hand wrapped in an Israeli flag, the other in a Palestinian flag. It is difficult to dismiss all of this as mere coincidence.
- 4.13. I have some sympathy for comrades arguing that the discussion must move beyond symbols and semantics. But in doing so, we risk missing a crucial opportunity to politically analyze what underlies them. For instance, the refusal to use the word 'genocide' reveals at least four critical problems, in my opinion.
- 4.14. First, an excessive concern with how the Israeli-Jewish working class would perceive our statements, even when we were simply, to use Rosa Luxembouré's expression, "loudly proclaiming what is happening". Second, an overly rigid approach to the formulation of our program, in which the local section was given disproportionate weight in scrutinizing how we fine-tune our demands and slogans everywhere else—which was particularly problematic in the context of the effective detachment (although for no fault of their own) of the said section from the reality of a global mass movement shaking every continent at the time.
- 4.15. A third aspect is the sectarian idealisation of some unique 'Marxist' analysis which rejects the need to engage with legal definitions, terms or concepts sprung from non-Marxist frameworks. By this logic, arguments for recognising the onslaught on Gaza as a textbook case of genocide were dismissed as "legalistic" or as "sowing illusions in bourgeois international law". But this entirely missed the point. Millions appropriated the term genocide not out of blind faith in UN institutions or legal solutions but because they recognised the historic escalation of the Israeli state's violence. Furthermore, refusing to integrate this shift in mass consciousness into our own terminology did nothing to expose legal illusions, it only exposed a disconnect from the living movement—a disconnect which, bizarrely, some of our former comrades erected as a Marxist virtue.
- 4.16. Finally, this position reflected a certain mystification of the Israeli working class and a downplaying of the reaction affecting it. Indeed, one of the more 'objectively grounded' justifications repeatedly put forward by leading Israeli comrades in our internal discussions during the early months of the genocide

was that there was no sufficient basis/social support in Israeli society for a policy of genocide in Gaza—a claim that has collapsed under the weight of events.

- 4.17. According to a recent survey by the aChord Center, 62% of Israelis agree with the statement that “there are no innocents in Gaza.” Another poll from the Jerusalem Post revealed that 73% of Israeli Jews consider Trump’s idea to expel all Gazans from the Strip “desirable”, while only 3% consider it “immoral”. A poll conducted in December 2024 by Tel Aviv University’s Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) showed that for the first time in nearly 18 years, a majority of Israeli Jews oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state “under any condition”. In yet a separate poll conducted on January 29, nearly 70% of Israelis want to extend Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank.
- 4.18. While polling data can never capture the full complexity of political attitudes—and small but important counter-trends do exist— these figures unmistakably reflect a dominant mood within Israeli-Jewish society. These points are not meant as a call to abandon the fight to win sections of the Israeli-Jewish working class to a socialist, anti-Zionist position; but as a call for a more realistic and nuanced assessment of its current consciousness.
- 4.19. Furthermore, given the general crisis that has torn our former international apart—and particularly given the troubling course taken by the leadership of our former local section in this context (which is now in talks to potentially re-join the CWI)—we must ask ourselves whether these misjudgments are merely isolated incidents, or symptoms of deeper political blind spots.
- 4.20. Revisiting the material we have produced over the years with a critical eye, it becomes clear to me that on more than one occasion, our analysis displayed an inadequate sensitivity towards the oppressed nation; at times, it slipped into a form of ‘both-sidesism’—as in this statement, where the question of “self-defence” is framed as equally applicable to “both sides of the national divide”, as if they faced equivalent threats and possessed comparable means of defense)— and exhibited, on occasions, a certain hesitancy to speak out on issues that were ‘unpopular’ in Israel. The organization’s non-committal and evasive approach to the ‘right of return,’ which I discuss in the final section of this document, is particularly revealing in this regard.
- 4.21. To be clear, and in anticipation of potential criticisms, my argument on the experience and trajectory of our former section should not be taken as a one-sidedly negative observation. It is clear that the weaknesses in our analysis and program over the years cannot be all imputed to it, nor to the specific demographic center of gravity of the CWI/ISA. As we will see, some of these issues long predate the official founding of the section in Israel in 1999.
- 4.22. Additionally, it is important to recognise that having a section actively involved within the entrails of Zionism did unquestionably serve as an

international source of inspiration and a living example of what a class-based work within Israeli society can concretely entail. By confronting and challenging Israeli chauvinism directly on its home ground, it has pierced through the ideological fog surrounding Zionism and provided valuable insights into a working class that much of the international left often dismisses as either non-existent, entirely inaccessible, or irredeemable.

- 4.23. This is no academic question. The development of revolutionary socialist forces within the 'Green Line' remains, from my perspective, not just important but a strategic consideration in the struggle for the liberation of the Palestinians.
- 4.24. Of course, this struggle will, first and foremost, be driven by the revolutionary mobilization of the Palestinian masses themselves, in alliance with the Arab working class and all forces fighting against oppression in the region, and bolstered by an international solidarity movement whose potential has been powerfully demonstrated over the past year and a half. Yet the special material foundation of the Israeli Zionist regime means that its overthrow cannot be achieved by external pressure alone, i.e. without the active breaking away of at least significant sections of the Israeli-Jewish working class from the Zionist project.
- 4.25. A key specificity of the colonial question as posed in Palestine-Israel and of the political economy underlying Zionism is indeed that it developed in a way that did not centrally depend on the exploitation of Arab wage labor. Israeli society is not based as much on the economic exploitation of the Palestinian people as it is based on their exclusion, displacement and physical elimination.
- 4.26. While Palestinian workers do play a role in certain sectors of the Israeli economy—particularly in construction, agriculture, and services— and have been used as both a 'reserve army of labour' and a source of extra profit for the Israeli ruling class, they have never been structurally indispensable to its functioning. The fundamentally disposable nature of this workforce was starkly demonstrated when, after October 7, the Israeli state revoked overnight the work permits of nearly all Palestinian workers from the occupied territories—roughly 150,000 from the West Bank and an additional 18,500 from Gaza.
- 4.27. This distinctive class dynamic underscores the need to develop socialist forces capable of challenging Zionism's stranglehold inside Israel itself, encouraging class fractures from within as a necessary component of a broader strategy to dismantle Zionist oppression and occupation, and advance the region's socialist transformation.
- 4.28. That said, the necessity of this break does not negate—but rather heightens—the need for a serious reckoning with the historic shortcomings of our own tradition. In this light, important achievements and glaring gaps are not mutually exclusive. The strengths of our former organisation do not absolve us of the need to also critically examine the limitations and problems. If we accept,

as we must, that the insights gained from this work have, in some respects, enriched our understanding, we must also recognize the other side of the coin: the fact that the lack of a deeper integration into the lived experiences of the Palestinian and Arab working class have, in other respects, restrained our political understanding and practice.

- 4.29. Perhaps most importantly, we should wonder whether, in turn, the practices, terminology, programmatic emphasis and political-cultural sensitivities —shaped, at least in part, by the specific composition and background of our organisation—, have hindered our ability to resonate and connect with Palestinian and Arab audiences, contributing in this way to enlarge and consolidate the original gap. Given the persistent vacuum of our presence in Arab-majority countries to this day —bar two PRMI supporters in Tunisia—, the question of whether this dynamic has played, however unintentionally, a role in perpetuating our marginalization in the region, needs to be raised.
- 4.30. I do not have the pretension to possess definitive answers to these questions. But I hope that the present document can help contribute to this much needed and urgent collective reflection. Revisiting “The Marxist Left, the National Conflict and the Palestinian Struggle”
- 4.31. There is an abundance of written material to reflect upon. As a starting point, I would like to highlight the text “The Marxist Left, the National Conflict and the Palestinian Struggle”, published in English in April 2016. While not particularly recent, this is a theoretically developed text that was agreed by the National Committee of the Socialist Struggle Movement, translated into Arabic and published as a pamphlet in that language, positioning it as a synthesis of key arguments of the section’s political approach on central relevant questions at the time for the left —including towards an Arab-speaking audience.
- 4.32. Admittedly, the text contains valuable material. But upon revisiting it recently, I was struck by its overall imbalance. While the text is without question sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle, there is a glaring disparity in the attention given to the situation within the ‘Green Line’ versus the realities in the occupied Palestinian territories, as it offers little more than cursory remarks on the specific conditions Palestinians endure under occupation and systemic oppression. The text acknowledges the “security fears among the Jewish public” early on, with similar references about the fear of Israeli Jews appearing multiple times. Yet, it fails to allocate a fraction of the same attention to the trauma and suffering of the Palestinians under military rule, apartheid, blockade, and repeated bombardments.
- 4.33. This imbalance is also reflected in the surface-level treatment of Palestinian politics compared to the analysis of Israeli political developments. The text doesn’t include any serious analysis of the historic or current roles of the Palestinian factions, the pressures shaping their policies, and the dynamics of

the Palestinian national struggle under their leadership. While Fatah and Hamas are correctly labeled as “pro-capitalist”, the text offers little substantive explanation for the same.

- 4.34. Calls to reclaim the entire territory of historic Palestine are dismissed as a “bourgeois national utopia”, with no real attempt to explain, in a transitional way, the limits of that position. To be sure, this demand falls short of addressing the complex realities on the ground today —particularly the need for a program that acknowledges the existence and rights of both Palestinians and Israeli Jews— and as a result, concrete visions on how it would come about are most often blurry and confused. Within the occupied territories themselves, the support for such an approach is today strongly tempered by a dose of realism about its impracticability. Nevertheless, the text itself recognises that “there’s a sentiment of sympathy for the old program of the PLO [Palestinian Liberation Organisation] to achieve an Arab-Palestinian nation state on the entire territory west of the Jordan river”. In that context, to brush it aside so casually appears somewhat tone-deaf.
- 4.35. Albeit with varying intensity depending on the country and context, this aspiration is still embedded in the collective psyche of the Arab masses, and has also found a renewed resonance in the international solidarity movement for Gaza, encapsulated in slogans like, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Historically it comes from the lived reality of dispossession and the searing trauma of the Nakba —the mass, violent expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinian people (between 1947 and 1949, Zionist forces seized 78% of historic Palestine, expelled at least 750,000 Palestinians, destroyed around 530 villages and towns, and killed up to 15,000 people in dozens of massacres). For countless Palestinians and supporters of their struggle today, it continues to symbolize the right to reclaim their land and assert their identity in the face of ongoing oppression and genocide. Dismissing it as a bourgeois fantasy fails to grapple with its historical weight and emotional depth, running the risk of alienating important layers of Arab and pro-Palestinian activists whom we want to engage.
- 4.36. Moreover, in a world where the leading bourgeois faction of the Palestinian struggle formally abandoned the goal of reclaiming all of historic Palestine as far back as 1988 —which at the time, was a stepping stone in the process of bourgeoisification of Fatah and the PLO— the term “bourgeois” applied to this demand becomes somewhat abstract, jargonish and ahistorical. It obscures more than it reveals, and ignores the contradiction between the bourgeois leadership’s retreat and the enduring attachment to this demand among significant layers of the Arab population —an attachment which has been reinforced by the deep discrediting and rejection of the ‘bourgeois’ Oslo framework.

- 4.37. Similarly, countering this demand, as the document does, by arguing that “Neither the PLO nor Palestinian political parties Fatah and Hamas have any road they can propose in order to “occupy” Israel” risks reinforcing a narrative that misrepresents and delegitimizes Palestinian aspirations to reclaim their homeland and restore justice for generations of violent displacement, by baselessly casting these aspirations as expansionist and as some Palestinian mirror-variant of Zionism. Without doubting the former comrades’ best intentions, this type of formulation made this text largely unusable towards an Arabic audience in the region.
- 4.38. The text critiques the “watering down of the differences between right-wing and left-wing forces” by Palestinians and “the dimming of political differences among the Arab-Palestinian minority in the name of ‘national unity’” within the ‘Green Line’, framing these issues as important obstacles in the development of their struggle. But it doesn’t sufficiently account for the other side of the equation: the reactionary chauvinist/racist/Zionist ideas and sentiments prevalent within the Israeli-Jewish population, nor does it consider how these sentiments contribute to shape the national mood of the Palestinians and influence how they perceive their oppressors.
- 4.39. In its Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Comintern, Lenin observed: “The age-old oppression of colonial (...) nationalities by the imperialist powers has not only filled the working masses of the oppressed countries with animosity towards the oppressor nations, but has also aroused distrust in these nations in general, even in their proletariat.” He went on to explain that special efforts were necessary to overcome this distrust —which is undeniably very pronounced in Palestine-Israel, where more than 15 months of genocide have deepened it further.
- 4.40. Yet rather than seriously examining the factors that shape Palestinian consciousness and obstruct, from their perspective, the prospect of a united struggle with the Israeli working class—particularly its Jewish layers— the former comrades’ text is noticeably far more concerned with rationalizing the consciousness of the latter. This results in a lopsided analysis that downplays the depth of Palestinian distrust and sidesteps the realities that make working class solidarity so difficult.
- 4.41. The passage mentioning the Palestinian refugees’ right of return is murkily worded. Consistent with how our current has approached this question (see paragraphs 110 to 141 of the present document for more details), the revolutionary edge of this demand is diluted into broader references to socialism— framed as a prerequisite for its realisation. The text notably argues for advancing “direct dialogue and consent” as part of the requirements for a just solution to the refugees’ plight. The term “consent” in this context is

particularly loaded, as it could imply that the implementation of this right must be subject to agreement from the Israeli side, rather than being a non-negotiable, historical right of the Palestinian people.

- 4.42. The parts under the subheads “A class approach to Israeli society” and “Who profits from the occupation?” are, in my opinion, quite crude, and at times insensitive to Palestinian national aspirations. They create an impression of abstract internationalism that doesn’t engage enough with the concrete, uneven conditions created by national oppression. The need for a class approach is articulated mainly from the perspective of the fears of millions of Israeli Jews and their will for national self-determination, rather than from the point of view of what is positively necessary for Palestinian liberation.
- 4.43. The document correctly highlights the class contradictions within Israeli society, and tackles the fact that Israeli-Jewish workers do not “profit” from the occupation. This is generally true in that the Israeli working class is ultimately harmed by the perpetuation of the occupation. However, the stark material, social, and political disparities between the Israeli-Jewish and the Palestinian working classes are too overlooked in this context. The argument presents a global perspective that focuses on the commonality of exploitation within the capitalist system and the austerity faced by workers. But in doing so, it tends to downplay the uniquely brutal and specific nature of the colonial oppression faced by Palestinians under Israeli occupation.
- 4.44. On their daily commute, an Israeli-Jewish worker drives freely on well-maintained roads, bypasses checkpoints or passes through them without issue, and arrives at work without fearing military raids. A Palestinian worker from the West Bank might have to wake up hours earlier, crammed into overcrowded checkpoints, subject to soldiers’ whims—harassment, detention, or outright denial of entry—only to reach a job where they are paid a fraction of what their Israeli counterparts earn. The Israeli worker might worry about making rent; the Palestinian worker might return to find their home reduced to rubble.
- 4.45. Within the ‘Green Line,’ Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel face systemic racism and institutionalized discrimination that notably translates into significantly higher poverty and unemployment rates. Decades of racialized state policies and discriminatory land practices have left their cities and towns overcrowded, with crumbling infrastructure, poorer public services, and far less government funding than Jewish-majority areas. On top of this, many Bedouin Palestinian Arab villages in the Naqab (Negev) desert are classified as ‘unrecognized’ by the Israeli state, meaning they do not appear on official maps, are denied basic services such as water, electricity, sewage, and roads, and face the constant threat of demolition.

- 4.46. Marxists, in the region as elsewhere, have a principled duty to expose the class realities that underpin Israeli society (including within the Israeli-Jewish working class itself, which is not homogenous—Mizrahi, Ethiopian, and Russian-Jewish workers, for instance, face racial discrimination and greater precarity, despite retaining relative ‘privileges’ over Palestinians). But as part of this, they must also acknowledge and confront the huge asymmetry in the respective experiences, rooted in colonial oppression. Failing to do so risks creating the impression of abstractly placing these realities on an equal footing in the name of ‘class unity’.
- 4.47. To be fair, the text contains some limited attempts to acknowledge this imbalance. But they are underdeveloped, reading more like perfunctory and defensive side notes meant to buttress what comes across as an essentially economistic argument, rather than parts of a comprehensive and independent recognition of, and genuine engagement with, the asymmetries provoked by the occupation. When applied to real-life discussions, such a blunt approach can undermine our ability to effectively convince people of our program and risks putting off those we aim to reach.

The merit, and problems, with the ‘two socialist states’ framework

- 4.48. The position adopted by our historical current vis-a-vis the national question in Palestine-Israel has evolved over time, reflecting —albeit imperfectly— the dynamic realities on the ground. As is well known, in 1947-48 Marxists opposed the UN partition plan for Palestine and the creation of the Israeli state, as a reactionary and colonialist response to a very real problem —the persecution of Jewish people— and as a purported fortress of Western imperialism in the region, “a force in that area on whom they can lean in their struggle to keep the Arab masses subdued,” as our predecessors in the Revolutionary Communist Party forewarned in August 1946 in their newspaper Socialist Appeal.
- 4.49. This stance was consistent with the revolutionary Marxist movement’s long-standing critique of Zionism as a bourgeois nationalist project, dating back from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This position had already been asserted during the early years of the Third Communist International; for example, the “complete liquidation” of Zionist ideology was posed as the “most important condition” for the affiliation of members of ‘Poale Zion’ (a movement that sought to combine Zionism with Marxism) to the Comintern.
- 4.50. In 1967, in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War, our forerunners wrote that only under the leadership of the working class was it possible to build a democratic socialist federation of all Arab states; within this framework, Israel was envisaged as an “autonomous region” with full equal rights for all minorities. It is in the years after that the possibility for a separate socialist state of Israel, alongside a socialist Palestine, was raised.

- 4.51. As I will explain, I believe this position was ultimately more problematic and confusing than useful. But I do not think the logic behind it was entirely without merit. Interestingly, as recounted by Tunisian left-wing veteran Fathi Ben Haj Yahia in 'The Bowl and the Cradle: Fragments of a History of the Left during the Bourguiba era', the Left group Perspectives in Tunisia experimented with a similar idea around the same period, with the formula of "two proletarian states side-by-side".
- 4.52. Some on the left argue that the right of self-determination doesn't apply to oppressor nations. This may be true in a formalistic and abstract sense; but it ignores the complex historical realities that shaped Israel's formation and social base. Zionism, despite its inherently reactionary, racist and colonialist nature, succeeded in establishing a foothold not just because of imperialist sponsors—though that was critical—but also because of the historic persecution, genocide and recurring flares of anti-semitic oppression faced by the Jews elsewhere.
- 4.53. This trajectory could have been cut across were it not for the repeated failures of the workers' movement's leadership in the interwar period. The inability of the socialist revolution to halt the rise of Nazism and prevent the Holocaust, combined with the defeat of the Great Palestinian Revolt of 1936–39—facilitated not only by British repression but also by the Stalinized Comintern's policy of subordinating the Palestinian Communist Party to bourgeois Arab nationalism—were decisive factors in creating the mass base and conditions for the establishment of a de facto Jewish supremacist state.
- 4.54. Throughout the 1920's and 1930's, moves towards working class-unity in struggle had emerged on multiple occasions, only to be repeatedly undermined by the Zionist 'labour' leadership, Arab nationalist leaders, and the erratic policies of the Stalinists. Even on the brink of the Nakba, the 1946 general strike—which brought together up to 30,000 Jewish and Arab workers—stood as a significant testament to the potential for such solidarity, despite the extreme polarization that eventually prevailed. The USSR's support for the Nakba—through its early recognition of the State of Israel, its arms supplies to the Zionist militias, but also its refusal of an open-door policy for Jewish survivors—exemplifies the extent to which betrayals from the leadership of the working class at the time helped cement a reactionary outcome that was neither predetermined nor inevitable.
- 4.55. The fact remains that by the late sixties, Israel had a more densely populated and generationally rooted Jewish population, many of whom had entrusted their lives and futures to the state.
- 4.56. The Six-Day War, launched by Israel who henceforth occupied the remaining Palestinian territories of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip—as well as the Syrian Golan Heights—provoked the further displacement of around

300,000 Palestinians, an event known as the 'Naksa' (or 'Setback'). But by exacerbating Jewish-Arab tensions in the region, it also triggered significant outbursts of antisemitism —accelerating the exodus of Jewish populations from Arab countries, particularly from North Africa. This was compounded by the reactionary policies of Arab regimes which, rather than advancing a principled struggle against Zionism, often scapegoated their own Jewish populations. The new wave of Jewish refugees migrating to Israel further reinforced the demographic and ideological foundations of the Israeli state, consolidating its (mis)perception as a 'safe haven' for Jews facing persecution.

4.57. This, of course, did not negate the oppression and dispossession of the Palestinians nor the Zionist State's expansionist ambitions; on the contrary, both only became more entrenched. But it did mean that holding on to a blanket opposition to any state entity for the Israeli Jews became untenable —if, that is, one accepts the premise that socialism can only be achieved through the voluntary association of working people of all countries and nations.

4.58. A month after the Yom Kippur war, in November 1973, Peter Taaffe wrote an article for an internal bulletin of Militant. It is worth revisiting, as the Socialist Party of England & Wales (CWI) recently republished it, uncritically praising its political content and clarity as a "testament to our tradition." In it he wrote: "Our position, with the main fighting slogan being the call for the socialist federation of the Middle East, expresses the real needs of the masses of the area. In Israel we would advocate a programme and perspective which based itself on opposing the imperialist policies of Zionism, which pointed to the Zionist state as being a bloody trap for the peoples of the area. At the same time, we hold out the prospect of a separate Jewish state and a separate Palestinian state if the peoples so desired on the basis of a socialist federation. Only a socialist federation could offer the possibility of solving both the social problems and the national rights of all the minorities both within Israel and throughout the Arab world."

4.59. Marxists recognize that national consciousness is a powerful force under capitalism. Both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis had developed distinct national identities and historical experiences. Since socialism cannot be built if one nation dominates or denies the rights of the other, the logic of recognizing, in a future, socialist framework, a right to statehood for both nationalities if the peoples so desired was (and remains) appropriate, in my opinion.

4.60. To be clear, this does not mean that Jews in Israel are an oppressed nation or a persecuted minority—they clearly are not. Rather, the right to self-determination should serve as a safeguard for the future: in the event that, after the overthrow of the capitalist-Zionist regime, they become a minority, socialists would neither strip them of their national rights nor force them into a unitary state against their will.

- 4.61. However, recognizing a right and pro-actively advocating for its exercise are not the same thing. Recognizing a right means acknowledging its legitimacy in principle, while advocating for it implies promoting its realization. In our case, recognizing the right of self-determination for Israeli Jews means acknowledging that, under socialism, they should have the option to freely determine their own national status. That is entirely different from explicitly advocating for a socialist Israeli state or socialist ‘Jewish’ state in the present— especially if a multinational socialist federation, a bi-national state or another arrangement could better serve the interests of all working people in the region.
- 4.62. This is not a minor distinction, particularly given the overwhelming and justified hostility in the region toward the Israeli state, and, by extension, towards any formula that could be understood as legitimising it. The very fact that we have spent decades repeating variations of this demand —and often in a more rigid form than Taaffe’s early formulation, which at least included the provision “if the peoples so desired”— speaks volumes about how cavalierly our tradition has treated the extreme sensitivity of this issue.
- 4.63. In seeking to make our socialist program arguably more palatable to Israeli-Jewish workers, we adopted a formula that was anathema to tens of millions of Arabs. This points to a deeper problem: our approach was overwhelmingly shaped by concerns over how Israeli Jews would perceive our program, while nowhere near the same level of attention was given to how it would be received by Arab workers and youth in Palestine and the rest of the region. A fully internationalist approach would have started from the aspirations and agency of the Palestinian masses, ensuring that any formulation we advanced did not —however inadvertently—lend sanction to the very structures they fight to overthrow.
- 4.64. There were other issues in Taaffe’s approach. For a start, the expression “Jewish state” has exclusionary implications. It conflates Jewish identity and statehood, erasing the fact that many Jews worldwide do not identify with Israel, and disregarding the rights of non-Jewish minorities within such a framework. Given the ruling class’s use of this conflation to delegitimize criticisms of Israeli state policies as antisemitic, the Jewish supremacist nature of the Israeli State (today codified in law through the 2018 Nation-State Law), and the systemic treatment of Palestinians as second-class citizens within current-day Israel, this term was problematic.
- 4.65. More fundamentally, the phrasing above does not confront the foundational displacement inherent to the existence of the Zionist state —in particular the continued ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, which was especially violent and concentrated during the Nakba and Naksa, and the ongoing denial of their right of return.

- 4.66. Lenin argued not only that no nation should be coerced into remaining within a state against its will—a principle often cited in the CWI—but also that the working class must defend the right to self-determination “without undertaking to give anything at the expense of another nation.” In this sense, leaving a formulation subject to the interpretation that socialists might be endorsing the imperialist-imposed ‘Green Line’ as the legitimate borders of a future ‘socialist Israel’, i.e. advocating the socialist extension of a state which was built precisely at the expense of another nation—all while remaining silent on the millions of Palestinians denied their right to return—represented a glaring omission. These unresolved issues—sometimes addressed with various (and most often problematic) formulations, sometimes ignored altogether—have, in my view, never been adequately addressed in the years and decades since.
- 4.67. Moreover, as I shall try to demonstrate, in the process of encrusting the “two socialist states” approach, our firm opposition to the Zionist state became more diluted over time. Whereas I agree that today, a national, Israeli-Jewish consciousness has effectively come into existence and consequently, in the context of revolutionary change in the region its people should be offered the right to self-determination—including to statehood if necessary—, as Marxists we should still unambiguously oppose, and stand for the dismantling of, the Zionist, capitalist and ethnocratic State of Israel. Yet a dangerous ambivalence has been entertained in the CWI over this question.
- 4.68. Consider, for instance, the following sentence from Taaffe’s 1973 piece: “it is only the Jewish and Arab working class which can complete the bourgeois-democratic revolution, unity of the area, land reform, and the expulsion of imperialism including the Zionist capitalists and their state.” (my emphasis)
- 4.69. Now compare this with a passage written a decade later, extracted from ‘Crisis in the Middle East’, an article published in *Inqaba* (the journal of the Marxist Workers’ Tendency, the then South African section of the CWI), signed by a certain ‘Daniel Hugo’: “In 1948, Marxists opposed the creation of a separate Israeli state because it was clear from the outset that this artificial state would be a source of conflict and division among workers. But does that mean that Marxists should now stand for the destruction of the state of Israel?”
- 4.70. The implied answer is that Marxists should not—as if the state of Israel was no longer a “source of conflict and division among workers”. With this implication, the article introduces a false equivalence between the current Israeli state, which enforces Zionist colonization, US imperialist interests, and capitalist exploitation, and Marxists’ recognition of the right of the Israeli-Jews to self-determination and to their own statehood in a socialist framework.

- 4.71. Marxists unequivocally oppose the oppressive foundations of the Israeli state, so yes indeed, are in favour of its root-and-branch “destruction”. This does not mean that those exact terms should be used as a slogan in every agitation material, nor that this idea cannot be calibrated in a language that is intelligible to Israeli-Jewish working class people, obviously; but it means a principled commitment to overthrow the Zionist and capitalist state apparatus, and to replace it with a framework that ensures full rights and equality for both Palestinians and Jews. Especially in more developed propaganda material such as in the example cited, precision is crucial. Leaving such ambiguities open on a question of this importance, and blurring the lines between the class character of today’s Israeli state and a hypothetical, future de-Zionized ‘socialist Israel’, is deeply confusing.
- 4.72. Later the same article is even more explicit, by stating: “Subject to certain conditions—e.g. guarantees of the rights of minorities and of returning Palestinians—the need for an Israeli state to exist within agreed borders must be accepted today.” (my emphasis) Here it becomes clear that the position has shifted from recognizing the right of Israeli Jews to self-determination under socialism to a categorical assertion that an Israeli state must exist. While the stated conditions are important, they are fundamentally incompatible with the very nature of what is commonly understood as the ‘Israeli state’—a state founded on national exclusivity. This stance also disregards the possibility that, through the course of a struggle for revolutionary transformation, alternative political arrangements could emerge that ensure the rights of all inhabitants of historic Palestine.
- 4.73. Was this notable shift in political emphasis an isolated case, a clumsy formulation, or an issue related to the specific author of the above-mentioned article? Taaffe’s own later writings suggest otherwise. In an article entitled ‘The National Question in Taiwan and Other Countries’ written in 2005, he explained, while polemicising with a Japanese left-winger: “How can imperialism be defeated in the Middle East and specifically, in the case of the Israeli state, without a policy of changing the alleged “pro-imperialist” consciousness of the Israeli population? This in turn would be impossible without recognising the consciousness of the Israeli population on the need for maintaining their own state.” (my emphasis)
- 4.74. The expression “maintaining their own state” used here is outright problematic. As should be clear to all Marxists, it is not “their” state, but the state of the Israeli ruling class. By confusing the two, this formulation appears to be legitimizing the very structure and borders that sustains the dispossession and occupation of the Palestinians, by suggesting that they should be preserved. Marxists do not support the “maintenance” of any capitalist state —let alone

one built on the blood, mass displacement and subjugation of another people, and on the denial of the latter's own right to self-determination.

- 4.75. Again, in the book 'Marxism in Today's World', originally published in 2006 —which served as an important theoretical tool for the education of many CWI members over years— the same Peter Taaffe goes on: "We accept that many Arab workers, to begin with, will have the attitude that the Israeli state has to be dismantled. It is an imperialist wedge against the Arab revolution. But once it is posed correctly, it can be accepted." (my emphasis)
- 4.76. Where does one even begin to dissect the problems with this formulation? Arab workers' willingness to dismantle the Israeli State is reduced to an "attitude" that needs to be changed, rather than a legitimate aspiration grounded in their experiences. The tone also drips with paternalism, implying that Marxists have the authority to "correctly" frame the question for Arab workers, who are then expected to "accept" Taaffe's enlightened guidance. This language is disturbingly reminiscent of Arthur Balfour's infamous declaration that Zionism was "of far profounder import than the desires and prejudices" of the Arabs inhabiting Palestine.
- 4.77. Today, as anger for this genocidal state has surged across the world, and as its overthrow is rightly seen by millions of Palestinians as a condition for their liberation, such an approach is particularly jarring, and reveals not the limitations of Arab workers, but the shortcomings of our own tradition —who is in need of changing its 'attitude' if it doesn't want to remain an irrelevant factor in the region.
- 4.78. Yet these formulations are not accidental — the CWI archives reveal a recurring pattern of misguiding and insensitive phrasings of this nature. In *How Can A Palestinian State Be Achieved?* written in 2002, Hannah Sell writes: "Israel is now in existence and over time the population has developed a national consciousness. Given this, to deny the Israeli Jews the right to their own nation, is a violation of the right to self determination. Moreover, it is unachievable given the military backing of US imperialism from the Israeli state." (my emphasis)
- 4.79. Invoking the military backing of US imperialism as one of the reasons to uphold the Israeli-Jews' right to self-determination empties the meaning of self-determination entirely. Genuine self-determination of either national group cannot exist as long as a state that functions as a strategic outpost for US imperialism in the Middle East, and imposes the oppression of one nation upon the other, remains in place. "Can a nation be free if it oppresses other nations? It cannot", Lenin famously said. Isn't that one of the central reasons why Trotskyists historically opposed the building of a homeland for the Jews in Palestine?

- 4.80. Moreover, similar to the other quotes above, this statement dangerously conflates the right of self-determination for the Israeli-Jews, as a nation, and the current Israeli (i.e. Zionist) state: it asserts that Israeli Jews have a right to their own nation, but ties this right to the maintenance of the Israeli state in its present form —the very state that relies on US imperialist support for its dominance in the region. A reasonable interpretation of this passage is that not only the current Israeli state is the legitimate embodiment of the Israeli Jews’s right to their own nation, but that it also cannot be meaningfully challenged because of the might of US imperialism.
- 4.81. Anyone who doesn’t accept the existence of the ‘Israeli state’ is thus categorised as denying the right of the Israeli-Jews to their own nation. This echoes a typical Zionist rhetorical move to delegitimize anti-Zionist perspectives, by equating opposition to the current Israeli state with denying Israeli Jews any form of national existence. Since the Israeli Jews already have a state and self-determination today, Marxists, by this logic, must fight to preserve it. We can see how easily such dubious reasoning can slip into a leftwing justification for Zionism.
- 4.82. A similar logic has resurfaced in more recent discussions, as is apparent in the document “Political Situation Israel-Palestine” written by 11 Belgian comrades in response to the resolution recently adopted by the Belgian section’s national congress. The comrades write: “Obviously, there is no place for the Zionist state in a socialist society. Should we therefore assume the destruction of states as a fundamental demand to profile the ideas of socialism, especially when there is a national conflict? Demanding the death of the state of Israel will never bring about unity in our class. This is an example of what a transitional program is not.”
- 4.83. The document employs heavily loaded language— “death of the state of Israel”—to dismiss the idea more forcefully, but its core argument seems to be that calling for the dismantling of the Zionist state is incompatible with a transitional approach, and would undermine class unity. But can we seriously speak of “class unity” with Palestinian workers through equivocations about the nature of a state that is actively engaged in their physical extermination?
- 4.84. Whether the tearing down of the Israeli state should be posed as a ‘fundamental demand’ is context-dependent. Of course Marxists do not simply issue abstract ultimatums but intervene in struggles with demands that clarify the road to liberation and resonate with the movement’s dynamics.
- 4.85. However, in our interventions in the international solidarity movement, in the context of mass global opposition to the genocide in Gaza, a slogan along the lines of ‘Smash the capitalist, Zionist state machine!’ would be politically appropriate and resonate powerfully, as it captures the urgent need to dismantle the institutional and military structure enabling the genocide. This

should not be understood as a substitute for explaining how this process can unfold or which social forces can drive it, but as a way to connect the immediate outrage to the deeper, structural realities of oppression.

- 4.86. At the core of our position should be the rejection of any framework that ties the right to self-determination to the preservation of a capitalist state—especially one predicated on the subjugation, dispossession and genocide of another people. This does not negate our recognition of national consciousness among Israeli Jews, nor our commitment to the principle of self-determination for all peoples. But we must be clear that genuine self-determination for both the Palestinians and the Israeli-Jews can only emerge through the dismantling of the Zionist state and its replacement with democratic socialist structures built by the working class. Thus our engagement with Israeli Jewish workers and youth must be grounded in an uncompromising exposure of the Zionist state’s reactionary role —not only in enforcing war, oppression, land dispossession and racist inequality but in sustaining their own exploitation. What we cannot do is offer ambiguous reassurances about the ‘maintenance’ of a state whose very existence is bound to colonial violence.

Why does this matter?

- 4.87. This might seem like an exercise in pedantic, conceptual hair-splitting. In reality, it is a litmus test for our political credibility, a ‘make-or-break issue’ if we are to have any hope of building a viable Marxist organisation in the region. Of course, the fate of Marxist organization-building in the region hinges on many other factors —but this one is critical.
- 4.88. It is worth recalling that the comrades who intervened in Egypt in the first, revolutionary months of 2011 lost dozens of contacts once that specific question came onto the table. We had similar experiences in our attempts to build in Lebanon, then in Tunisia. A facile reading of this would be that we were correct and these contacts and former members were all mistaken. A more convincing and honest explanation is that our organization, heavily shaped by the overriding imperative of “not alienating the Israeli-Jewish working class,” lacked both the theoretical clarity and the lived experience to articulate a program on the national question in Palestine-Israel from the perspective of those ‘on the other side of the fence’. As a result, comrades found themselves ill-equipped to respond when confronted with this reality in more than abstract terms.
- 4.89. To be clear, this is not just a matter of tactical presentation, but also one of revolutionary principles. There is a reason why Lenin identified the attitude towards the state as “the touchstone on which the real understanding and recognition of Marxism should be tested”. The Israeli state in its present form is a capitalist and colonial state that must be brought down. Any hesitation on this

question risks cutting conversations short before they can even begin, signaling to others a failure to understand the stakes involved, or an unwillingness to take a principled stance against the occupation and the genocide.

- 4.90. This does not mean, of course, that those we engage with will necessarily share our views of what dismantling the Israeli state concretely involves, or how it can be done. Some may harbor problematic views, such as equating all Israeli citizens with Zionism. But my point is that any equivocation on the need to uproot the Israeli State will be a non-starter for the vast majority of those we want to speak to.
- 4.91. This question has important bearing on how to approach, for example, the debate on ‘normalisation’. In all Arab-majority countries, there is a strong current of opposition to the normalization with the Israeli State which, for all practical purposes, is tantamount to the normalization of the occupation regime and of the national oppression of the Palestinians.
- 4.92. The genocide over the past year and a half has further intensified these sentiments. The latest Arab Barometer poll shows a significant decline in popular support for normalization with Israel. This shift is particularly stark in Morocco —which had a relatively ‘high’ level of support compared to other countries— where it has plummeted from 31% in 2022 to just 13% today.
- 4.93. This is why in many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, the Israeli state is commonly referred to as the “Zionist entity”. This term is not used in a blanket manner across the region, nor do all those who employ it—or oppose normalization—attach the exact same meaning to it. In some instances, the term can carry antisemitic connotations, and reactionary Arab regimes and forces have opportunistically wielded it to serve their own political agendas. Unlike “Zionist state,” the term “entity” does not explicitly differentiate between the ruling class institutions and Israeli citizens, hence should be treated with caution. But these important caveats should not overshadow the fact that for large sections of the population, the rejection of normalisation and the use of such terminology express, at its core, genuine and heartfelt solidarity with the Palestinian masses. In Tunisia, for example, the use of the term “Zionist entity” has a long-standing tradition within the labour movement itself.
- 4.94. Our experience in the region had already shown years ago that, given this deeply ingrained opposition to the very foundation and ideological premise of the Israeli State, particularly in a context where the meaning of socialism remains poorly understood, any explicit reference to a “socialist Israel” or to the coexistence of two states in a socialist confederation —however well-intentioned— can do more harm than good.
- 4.95. In the past, we often argued —and I was among those comrades—that this position functioned as a transitional bridge to foster mutual confidence and lay the groundwork for future class unity. Yet, in practice, there is little evidence

that it ever served that purpose for Arab workers and youth. On the contrary, the overwhelming feedback was that this framing clashed sharply with their lived experience and consciousness. It did not open a bridge for discussion—it erected a wall.

- 4.96. The bitter lessons of the Oslo Accords and their catastrophic fallout, along with the glaring bankruptcy of the two-state framework as championed by imperialism, have only added to the reasons why such formulations risk being perceived as little more than a left-wing façade for legitimizing the continued existence of a Jewish supremacist state, the Zionist-dictated borders, and the colonial land thefts and dispossessions on which they rest.
- 4.97. Unfortunately, in general the need to learn from our work in the wider region, namely outside of the ‘Green Line’ (within which our main work was concentrated) and to absorb that experience —allowing it to enrich our understanding, refine our program, and adapt our sensitivities and terminology to the regional political realities outside of Israel itself— was not taken seriously enough. As a then CWI member from Lebanon who intervened in Cairo in 2011 commented to me recently, “The position never considered the Arab views and their perspective.”
- 4.98. Yet today, similar conclusions seem to be transpiring from many comrades’ interventions in the global Gaza solidarity movement. The resolution ‘What strategy for the national and social liberation of the Palestinian masses? Adopted by the Belgian National Congress —while containing some limitations that hopefully can be taken up in further discussion and material— rightly states: “The term “socialist Israel” is inappropriate in particular contexts of genocide, extensive occupation policies such as in the West Bank and total destruction of people and infrastructure in Gaza. Today – and this would probably have been the case for some time before the genocide in Gaza – we need to place more emphasis on how radically different the region would look after a socialist revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. The term “Israel” expresses a continuity of borders that we must avoid.”
- 4.99. This is even without addressing the fact that using the term “socialist Israel” can also inadvertently evoke the ideas of the early, arguably ‘left’ Zionist currents, embodied in movements like the Mapai party and figures like David Ben-Gurion, whose ‘socialist’ vision for Israel was deeply intertwined with the colonial project and ultimately served to justify the exclusion and oppression of the Palestinians.
- 4.100. On top of these political factors, in the region specifically there is the added complication that several Arab countries (Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Algeria) have explicit legislation in place that criminalises normalisation —which in most cases extend to individual contacts with citizens of Israel and in the case of Iraq, is punishable by death or life imprisonment.

- 4.101. For all these reasons, a less ‘prescriptive’ formulation —centered on the need for the revolutionary overthrow of the Zionist regime and of all reactionary capitalist dictatorships in the Middle East, and pointing towards a voluntary socialist confederation of the region in which all communities have full equality of rights— is more appropriate.
- 4.102. Having said this, however flawed our historical position may have been, it had an underlying strength: it refused to ignore, as many on the left do, that Zionism has, through decades of colonization and imperialism-backed state-building, forged a distinct Israeli national identity among millions of Jews living there. To pretend otherwise is to surrender Marxist analysis to wishful thinking. At this stage at least, Israeli Jews are unlikely to simply cast aside this identity of their own accord; in that sense, upholding their right to determine themselves freely in a future socialist context remains valid.
- 4.103. But again, that is very different from making an explicit call for two socialist states now —which not only erects an artificial barrier to address the most advanced layers of the Palestinian solidarity movement, but is also an unnecessary attempt to rigidly predetermine the precise contours of a future state arrangement.
- 4.104. In the context of a socialist revolutionary upsurge across the region—a scenario that admittedly appears very distant now, but is the only context in which the formulation of such demands by Marxists would gain mass relevance— the basis for the entrenched mutual distrust that prevail today might be significantly challenged. In such a transformed scenario, the argument for class unity across borders, and even for a joint socialist state, could find a more fertile ground. The right to a hypothetical transitory workers’ state offering Israeli Jews a voluntary step to join a future socialist confederation might become superfluous. This is of course something Marxists would welcome and encourage; as Lenin explained, other conditions being equal, the working class will always stand for the largest state and the closest possible economic amalgamation of territories.
- 4.105. Undeniably, as it is, the genocide in Gaza over the past 15 months has made the notion of cohabitation in a single state appear more remote than ever to many Palestinians, and has deepened the schism between the two nationalities. This is shown by a poll from September 2024, in which 51% of Palestinians (49% in the West Bank and 54% in the Gaza Strip) prefer a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders, while 19% (14% in the West Bank and 27% in the Gaza Strip) prefer a confederation between two states, and only 10% (11% in the West Bank and 9% in the Gaza Strip) say they prefer the establishment of a single state with equality between the two sides.
- 4.106. But we must also recognize that such polls are inevitably shaped by the brutal reality of occupation, the stark power imbalance, and the despair they

breed. Many Palestinians may answer with their heads, while their hearts might tell a different story. In the past, similar polls were often used to justify the call for two socialist states—framed as evidence that “Palestinians don’t want to live in the same state as Israelis anyway.”

- 4.107. But a mass struggle across the region that would pose an existential threat to the Zionist state would lead to completely new openings that are very difficult to predict today, and render the idea of a detailed prescription a largely speculative exercise. Ultimately, the bottomline is not whether the working classes of the region choose one state or two—it is their capacity to construct a voluntary socialist confederation based on their own power, full equality, mutual respect, and the collective ownership and planning of resources. And, eventually —if the right of self-determination means anything at all— it will be up to them to decide it.
- 4.108. The point above also underscores why our program cannot be formulated in isolation from the wider regional dynamic; it must be anchored in an internationalist perspective, addressing not only the Palestinian question but the interconnected struggles against dictatorship, imperialism, and capitalist exploitation across the region. The MENA revolutions, the Kurdish struggle for national rights, the repeated uprisings in Iran, all show the potential for regional upheavals that could shatter the existing regimes. Such upheavals would not leave Palestine-Israel untouched; they can fundamentally alter the balance of forces, breaking the reactionary deadlock that helps sustain the Israeli occupation regime—a regime upheld by a regional and imperialist order that is itself vulnerable to crisis and mass revolt.
- 4.109. This shifting regional balance is another reason why the form of a future settlement in Palestine-Israel cannot be approached in a rigid manner. The political terrain is not static, and neither can our approach be. Provided that we don’t compromise on matters of principle or overarching strategy, the exact terminology and emphasis we use in our program should be subjected to a healthy dose of flexibility, shaped by the changing material context and consciousness of the masses. And it is obvious that these forms and emphasis will not be the same in Beirut as in Tel-Aviv.
- 4.110. Any formulation that could be reasonably understood as denying the Israeli Jewish population their rights, including to self-determination, presents a serious problem, in my view. In that sense, an outright call for a single state on a socialist basis —notwithstanding all qualifications we might give to that idea— is, at this stage, too restrictive, and risks reinforcing nationalist fears of imposition rather than opening a path toward working-class solidarity.
- 4.111. However, given the legacy of our own current, it is worth stressing that just as problematic are all the formulations that, in the name of defending the Israeli-Jews’ right to self-determination, could be interpreted as truncating the

Palestinians' own self-determination by restricting it to those contiguous and overcrowded enclaves where they have been forcibly displaced — i.e., that do not clearly call for a dismantling of the colonial settlements, for the unconditional right of Palestinian refugees to return, for meaningful land restitution and the extension of the territory of Palestine to ensure a viable Palestinian state (rather than a microstate carved out of the pre-67, Zionist-imposed borders), as well as for guaranteed equal rights and freedom of movement for national minorities across a future confederation.

4.112. As stated earlier, any formulation referring to two states in a socialist framework can easily be understood as a socialist-coloured endorsement of the territorial status quo, and as a lack of wholesome recognition of the historic injustice done to the Palestinians. That is even more so when they lack any of the critical caveats outlined above. Seen in this light, it is my opinion that the way this demand was articulated in the CWI and ISA material was never fully adequate or intelligible to a Palestinian or Arab audience. At its worst, it was a hollow, doctrinaire phrase—casually tacked onto the end of articles and leaflets with little explanation, and seemingly even less thought.

A problematic approach to the “right of return”

- 4.113. To finish, I want to zoom in on a specific issue that is illustrative of a problematic approach our current has taken to the national question in the region, and which demands a critical reassessment. I am referring to the aspiration to the right of return for Palestinian refugees.
- 4.114. A striking observation when revisiting our material is how little has been written on this important topic over the years, despite the voluminous material on Palestine-Israel in general. Given the decades-long centrality of this question to the Palestinian struggle —particularly in countries hosting Palestinian refugees— isn't this lack of engagement, in itself, an illustration of a troubling imbalance?
- 4.115. Across the Middle East and North Africa, the right of return is seen as a fundamental aspect of justice for the Palestinians; it is regularly discussed in the media, in public discourse, in political movements and in society at large. It has been a defining issue in the political consciousness and solidarity movements with Palestinians for generations. The Great March of Return which started in March 2018 and continued on a weekly basis for over a year, mobilising tens of thousands along the Gaza-Israel border, was a landmark movement in the Palestinian struggle.
- 4.116. Yet not only are there very few articles of the CWI/ISA addressing the right of return; tellingly, those available in English mostly come from international authors. This doesn't mean that our former comrades in Israel never addressed this issue in Hebrew or Arabic, nor that they haven't participated, to a degree or

another, in the production or editing of articles authored by other comrades. But based on the above I think it is fair to state that this issue has generally remained underdeveloped and insufficiently incorporated in our program, in both the section and the international.

4.117. In October 2000, the CWI published *Middle East in Flames*, a 15,282-word statement —likely one of the longest ever produced by the organization on the region— written amid the early months of the Second Intifada. The latter erupted in the wake of the failure of the Camp David Summit in July 2000, a turning point that deepened Palestinian disillusionment and accelerated the collapse of the Oslo process. One of the key issues in the breakdown of negotiations was the right of return for Palestinian refugees, which Israel sought to bury. Palestinian refugee camps played a central role in the Second Intifada, with many of the most active fighters coming from refugee communities who had the most direct stakes in the struggle for return. Despite this, the CWI’s statement was virtually silent on the right of return, mentioning it only in passing in one sentence related to the Camp David talks. It was also absent from the 22 demands listed under “What the CWI stands for” (while the idea of a “socialist Israel” appeared in four of them).

4.118. Even more concerning are some of the most developed comments that have been made on this issue by our organisation which, in my view, often drifted into an ‘Israelo-centric’ and economist framework. An example: “One of the knottiest problems is undoubtedly the right of return of the Palestinians. Two or three generations of refugees have now endured the camps, longing for a return to their towns and villages occupied or destroyed by Israel after 1948 and 1967, or more recently. However, not only the Israeli ruling class but a majority of Israeli Jews fear that implementation of such a right would tip the demographic balance decisively against them. Effectively, it would spell the end of a Jewish state and they will not accept it. Some Arab leaders, including some PLO leaders, have flirted with the idea of trading the right of return for compensation for refugees returning to a Palestinian state (not surprisingly, contrasting Israel’s refusal to compensate the Palestinian diaspora with the massive reparations paid by West Germany to Israel and Jewish victims of fascism). Arab leaders dare not openly spell out such a proposition, however, as it would provoke fury amongst Palestinians, who would see it as a betrayal of their deepest national aspirations. But how can this legitimate demand be satisfied under capitalism? Only socialist states collaborating in a socialist federation, would have the political authority and material resources to

4.119. resolve the problem.” -‘Sharon’s brutal war’, Lynn Walsh, 2002 (the parts in bold are my emphasis)

4.120. The article effectively asks the Palestinians to wait for the socialist revolution before they can be afforded the right to return, caving in to a point of

fear-mongering propaganda used by the Israeli ruling class to turn its own population against that right. This argument is not only overly abstract and distant from the concrete demands of Palestinians who are struggling with displacement and oppression in the present. It also denies the Palestinians' agency in exercising their own right to return to their own land, postponing that right for 'when the right conditions are in place' —i.e. in a distant, socialist future.

- 4.121. Even worse is this passage, taken from Hannah Sell's 'How Can A Palestinian State Be Achieved?' already referenced earlier: "...the overthrow of the rotten capitalist regimes and the coming to power of democratic socialist governments would create the basis for genuine negotiations between the two peoples. It would be possible to begin to negotiate a solution to even the most intractable problems. For example, the right of return is ruled out on a capitalist basis, and, even if it were somehow to be implemented under capitalism, would only be a mirror image of what the Jews did to the Palestinians in 1948. However, a socialist Middle East could provide the full economic and social resources to absorb the millions of Palestinians who would be given the right of return and guarantee increased living standards for the whole population." (my emphasis)
- 4.122. Aside from the questionable language ("what the Jews did to the Palestinians"), which veers on antisemitism, the article shockingly equates the legitimate demands of the exiled Palestinians to return to their homeland with the Nakba itself! In an effort to tune in their arguments to prejudices among Israeli Jewish workers, both articles appear to be treating Palestinian refugees as a threat, which feeds into harmful stereotypes about refugees in general (an especially egregious framing in this case, as we are discussing people who either lived or whose ancestors lived on the land in question.)
- 4.123. This is not just a supposition; it was even at times presented so explicitly, such as in this line from Robert Bechert's 'The war and its wider impact' (2009): "Only with the national rights of the Palestinians and Israelis resolved would the question of the right to return of those who wish to not be seen as a threat." (my emphasis) This reinforces the Israeli state's narrative that Palestinian refugees represent a menace to its existence, thereby justifying the continued denial of their right until an undefined future.
- 4.124. The question of the demographic balance in the organisation's composition, and the pressures resulting from it, becomes particularly relevant here. I can indeed imagine how, when engaging with the Israeli-Jewish population living within the 'Green Line', it may be challenging to advocate for the right of Palestinian refugees to return. Nevertheless we are touching here on matters of principle: our responsibility to lead in building solidarity with oppressed Palestinians. What is at stake is the potential damaging of this solidarity and miseducation of our ranks in order to accommodate the layer of the working

class most susceptible to the barrage of Zionist propaganda. Had we succeeded in building a strong base of membership among the Palestinian and Arab populations, it is rather unlikely any of these compromises would have even been entertained.

4.125. This said, it is also important to dispute the underlying notion that such compromises are somewhat 'necessary' to gain a hearing within the Jewish population in Israel. Contrary to this assumption, several surveys have revealed a small, but significant, minority supporting the right of Palestinian refugees to return. A 2018 survey conducted by the Geocartography Knowledge Group among 500 Jewish Israelis found that "quite a few Israeli Jews, or at least many more than one would think, support the right of return of the Palestinian refugees." Despite the survey explicitly framing the question with the understanding that the recognition of this right could potentially allow over seven million Palestinian refugees to return, 16.2% of respondents still answered that they support that right —including one in four (25.9%) young Israeli Jews aged 18 to 34, as well as higher rates of positive answers among lower-income groups and women. I was unable to locate more recent polling data, and it must be noted that this survey predates the genocide; but its implications remain powerful. It demonstrates that Israeli Jewish workers and youth are not inherently 'impervious' to the question of Palestinian return.

4.126. By highlighting this, I do not mean to say that addressing the deeply rooted fears and insecurities within the broader Jewish population is not important. Yet, as the CWI quotes above reveal, there are troubling instances where the line between addressing these fears, and capitulating to them, has been dangerously crossed.

4.127. Responding to concerns about displacement, for instance, could begin by explaining that the Palestinians' demand for the right to return is not a call to expel Jewish residents from their homes. The available data shows that the repopulation of Palestinian villages by the return of the refugees need not involve any major problem of Jewish displacement or 'threat' to Jewish habitation —bar, of course, those in the settlements in the occupied territories. It would, however, require a fundamental restructuring of land ownership and control. While some towns have been built over or repurposed, significant areas remain underutilized or deliberately restricted for Jewish-only settlement and expansion. The core issue is not a lack of space but the political structures that enforce Palestinian dispossession.

4.128. The space and resources necessary to accommodate a return are indeed theoretically available —Israeli Jews currently live in just 6% of the landmass within the 'Green Line', a staggering statistic which highlights the artificial scarcity created by Zionist land policies. Instead of serving working people's needs, billions are squandered on settlement expansion, fueling Israel's killing

machine, and increasing the wealth of the country's richest—all while Palestinian communities are systematically strangled to preserve the Jewish supremacist character of the state.

- 4.129. These elements point towards the struggle needed to overthrow the Zionist regime, which fiercely opposes any demographic shift that threatens its grip on power, and to break the chokehold of capitalism in the region. Instead of bolstering militarism and the resource-guzzling settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, resources could be reclaimed and collectively utilized to fund a mass public housing program that addresses the urgent needs of displaced Palestinians, while also tackling the housing shortages and soaring prices faced by working-class Israelis.
- 4.130. Such a transformation would require a revolutionary rupture in which both Palestinian and Jewish workers reject the ruling class's divide-and-rule tactics and fight for a socialist reorganization of society, where land and resources are democratically controlled to serve the needs of all, rather than the interests of capital and settler-colonial domination.
- 4.131. At first glance, this may seem indistinguishable from the position laid out in the extracts referenced above: that only socialism can provide a lasting solution to this crisis. But the distinction I am drawing is a crucial one. Much of our organization's material on this issue has been shaped by an implicit—and persistent—"stageist" logic: the idea that socialism must come first, and only then can the right of return be accommodated. This framework turns support for that demand into a passive and conditional stance, rather than fully harnessing its revolutionary potential.
- 4.132. In *The New Israeli-Arab "Peace" Deal* written in October 2020, Shahar Ben Horin from Socialist Struggle Movement argues: "Only in a context of a struggle for profound, socialist, change in the region it is conceivable to seriously talk about creating the conditions to "peace between peoples". In such a context, it would also be possible to practically achieve a just solution to the refugee question, based on recognition of the historical injustice and an agreed outline that would allow those interested to rebuild their lives in a socialist Palestine and a socialist Israel."
- 4.133. This statement typically suggests that the right of return is something to be addressed after socialism is won, rather than a demand to be fought for in the present by the Palestinians and the global solidarity movement. This approach risks separating the fight for socialism from the lived realities of oppressed communities. Revolutionary change is not something that will simply happen tomorrow—it is forged through the struggles of the oppressed today, and the right of return is an integral part of that struggle.
- 4.134. Similarly, the 2021 article 'Israel-Palestine: how can we fight the occupation?' from Socialist Alternative in EWS explains: "That is why currently

the best solution to put forward is two socialist states, which would respect the right to self-determination of both Palestinians and Israelis, with borders agreed upon by working class communities. This could democratically decide and work out issues like the right of return, as part of a voluntary socialist confederation of the Middle East.”

- 4.135. Again, instead of championing the right of return and using it as a transitional demand to explain the need for socialism, the argument is inverted: socialism must first be achieved, so that we can then ‘work out’ how the refugees would be able to return.
- 4.136. This approach is problematic for another reason: it narrows the issue down to the economic transformation required, as if the issue was simply one of resources. But as evidenced by the lavish expenditures on subsidizing settlements, Israeli capitalism does not oppose the right of return because of resources constraint; while economic concerns certainly play a role in the consciousness of Israeli-Jewish workers and are cynically exploited by the Israeli ruling class, the latter does so in the main for political and ideological considerations, i.e. the Zionist state’s commitment to maintain and enforce a Jewish demographic majority that keeps the Palestinians out.
- 4.137. To be absolutely clear, I do not dispute the obvious point that a socialist transformation would profoundly alter the material conditions, and secure the basis for making the Palestinians’ prospect to return, and to live in dignity and in harmonious coexistence with all communities, a sustainable one. It is a bitter truth that without the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and Zionism in the region, the right of return is unlikely to ever materialise in any meaningful way.
- 4.138. However, it is wrong for Marxists, in the formulation of their demands, to make such a prospect a precondition for the defense and/or the realisation of that right. Not only does this approach alienates us from Arab and pro-Palestinian audiences who see this demand as a cornerstone of the Palestinian people’s decades-long fight for justice— it also deprives us of the ability to agitate for it and to popularise, through it, the need for the socialist revolution itself.
- 4.139. Incidentally, it also places us to the right of the United Nations, which recognises the “inalienable right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced and uprooted”. In a misplaced attempt to avoid alienating workers in the oppressor nation, we run here the serious risk of sidelining (or deferring until socialism) an important and legitimate demand of the working class in the oppressed nation instead.
- 4.140. If we want to be taken seriously, we need to boldly support the demand for the right of return now, not make it contingent on the future success of socialism in the region. As Trotsky explains, “the national struggle cannot be suspended by bare reference to the future world revolution”. Anything less risks

sacrificing a key demand of the Palestinians —in the name of a future that cannot materialize without them.

- 4.141. In 2018, the eruption of the Palestinian masses onto the stage of struggle, with the question of return emerging as a central call in the ‘March of Return’, did seem to have encouraged our former section to produce a more positively engaging, and less conditional, demand on this issue. The statement ‘Gaza Protest Massacre — For Mass Struggle to Lift the Siege!’ published by the Secretariat of the Socialist Struggle Movement included this formulation: “A just solution for the Palestinian refugees. Recognition of the historical injustice of the Nakba — the destruction of hundreds of communities and the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of residents — and recognition of the right of the refugees who wish so to return, while ensuring a life of welfare and equality for all residents.”
- 4.142. To be fair, I must stress that this demand is an improvement compared to the alternatives previously mentioned. It also seems to be the one featured in the section’s ‘What we stand for?’ on its website. However, I still have reservations about the phrase “who wish so”, a longstanding qualifier from the days of Ted Grant, who already in 1967 wrote “the Palestine Arab refugees would have the full right to return to Palestine if they wished.” In my view, this caveat, along with the ‘recognition’ formulation (recognising a right doesn’t ensure its implementation) imply that we are still somewhat hesitant about that right.
- 4.143. Based on my interactions with former Israeli comrades, this addendum is based on the fact that decades after the Nakba, many Palestinian refugees no longer wish to return to live in their ancestral homes and lands, now parts of present-day Israel. While this is certainly true, they should still be afforded the same right and freedom to go back as the others. Of course, each refugee should have the autonomy to decide whether to return or not; but framing the right as contingent upon this individual choice risks weakening the broader demand for the collective right of return for all Palestinians. Finally, for those refugees who choose to remain where they are based, this demand should preferably be coupled with calls not just for ‘recognition’ but also for material reparations to address the historical injustices they have suffered.
- 4.144. More recently, in the context of the genocide, in October of last year, a leading member of the section wrote an article in which the demand was: “Realization of a just solution to the refugee question through an agreed outline that would include recognition of the historical injustice and the right of those who wish to return.” Apart from the issues already outlined above, the main problem with this last phrasing is its vagueness and ambiguity. “Agreed outline” is very noncommittal – who is agreeing? Is this an agreement between states, ruling classes, or the masses themselves? Without specifying the forces

involved, this phrase leaves too much room for interpretations, which effectively waters the demand down.

4.145. As a final reference, I would like to bring attention to the approach taken by the late Israeli Socialist Organization (also known as Matzpen) on the right of return. I do not share all their positions, nor do I claim that their demand was flawless or comprehensive, but I think we have to humbly accept —without sectarian defensiveness— that as a starting point for a programmatic approach to this issue, their position was sharper and less obfuscatory than anything the CWI or ISA has ever written. In 1967, they wrote: “The Palestine Arab refugee problem is the most painful part of the Israeli-Arab dispute. We therefore hold that every refugee who wants to return to Israel must be enabled to do so; he should then obtain full economic and social rehabilitation. Those refugees who will freely choose not to be repatriated should be fully compensated for loss of property and for the personal suffering which has been caused to them.”

4.146. A genuinely internationalist and revolutionary approach must recognize that the right of return is not an abstract question that can be put on hold while waiting for the socialist package that will be delivered tomorrow, but a burning demand of the Palestinian struggle today—one that must be actively fought for as a constitutive part of the broader struggle for socialism in the region.

Conclusion: towards a deeper reckoning

4.147. As I have tried to outline, our inherited positions, shaped by both historical baggage and the specific composition of our tendency—internationally and in the region—have inevitably influenced our analyses and focus, producing and perpetuating significant blind spots in the process.

4.148. These factors have had a mutually reinforcing interaction: a flawed approach to Palestinian oppression—rooted in a broader tendency within our tradition to place the responsibility for ‘class unity’ on the oppressed—has set us up for failure in changing the demographic, which in turn has reinforced that flawed approach by making it even harder to break from a cycle of political one-sidedness. This has contributed to narrowing our strategic vision, trapping us in a framework that often prioritized the consciousness and pressures of the Israeli-Jewish working class over a truly internationalist perspective. This tunnel vision became so entrenched that, ironically, over the past year and a half, any criticism of it was dismissed as ‘succumbing to pressures’.

4.149. Recognizing these limitations is not about self-flagellation, nor is it about assigning blame. It does not negate the important insights and interventions that our former organisation has made. But if we are to develop a truly revolutionary approach to the Palestinian struggle—one that is not only theoretically sound but also capable of finding an echo among the masses—we must confront these blind spots head-on. Otherwise, they will continue to

obstruct our ability to connect with the forces that will be decisive in the revolutionary transformation of the region.

- 4.150. This demands more than critically-examining our written material; it requires a serious reassessment of our methods of work, our organizational culture, and our ability to engage with Palestinian and Arab audiences in a meaningful way. It means abandoning rigid formulas from the past in favor of an analysis rooted in the living contradictions of the present—an approach grounded in a profound empathy for the Palestinian struggle, rather than one that seeks to impose preconceived frameworks onto it.
- 4.151. Let there be no mistake: correcting these imbalances is not about ‘giving up’ on the Israeli-Jewish working class. We have rightly criticised the ISA leadership for fixating only on ‘what is dominant’, failing to see the contradictions in processes, and effectively abandoning a dialectical compass. We should, of course, not fall into the same pitfall. While Israeli society is overwhelmingly shaped by Zionist ideology, and the working class is deeply embedded in a settler-colonial framework, this does not mean that internal cracks cannot develop —whether due to economic crisis, the deep social inequalities, the contradictions of war and Zionism itself, or the pressures of regional and global struggles, as it happened during the revolutionary uprisings across the wider region in 2011.
- 4.152. Of course, the existence of such contradictions alone does not translate into solidarity with the Palestinians, to say nothing of a coherent political challenge to Zionism and the capitalist state. In a context where the left in Israel remains extremely weak, economic hardship, for instance, can just as easily be absorbed into reactionary outlets — reinforcing Zionist militarism, chauvinism, and racism rather than breaking with them.
- 4.153. That is precisely why it would be a dereliction of duty for Marxists not to seek to amplify these fault lines—to expose the false unity imposed by the Israeli ruling class and systematically demonstrate that the long-term interests of Israeli Jewish workers are fundamentally at odds with the colonial project. Our approach must include —but must not be reduced to, nor be held captive by— identifying where and how these internal fractures can be leveraged —however small, limited or imperfect those openings might seem today (or however overstated they might have been by our former comrades)— to help prepare the ground for the revolutionary transformation in the region as a whole.
- 4.154. However, if our strategy includes the necessity for sections of the Israeli working class to break with Zionism and support the Palestinian struggle, it must be rooted in an unwavering commitment to Palestinian liberation as a central pillar of our politics in the first place. This requires, dialectically, a deep understanding of —and integration into— the realities, struggles, and

aspirations of the Palestinian and Arab working class. Without this, our program risks remaining skewed—shaped disproportionately by the outlook of one national community and divorced from the actual movement of the most oppressed— rather than rooted in the full breadth of the region’s struggles.

4.155. Bridging this gap will be a monumental task, requiring more than rhetorical adjustments; it demands a serious political and organizational reorientation—one that I hope this document can help initiate.