Down with The Perpetrators of Palestinian Slaughter: Need for a Total Uprooting

September 29, 1982

The crocodile tears of Ronald Reagan—and even any genuine outrage he may have felt at the slaughter of the Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps—will not wash the blood from Begin-Sharon, who paved the way for the butchers of Saad Haddad’s private army and the breakaway Phalangists, both of whom had been armed by Israel for years. Nor can they clear Reagan of responsibility for the neo-fascist acts perpetrated in Lebanon. Nor can they excuse the whole Western imperialist camp which so hurriedly pulled out its so-called international peace-keeping force the minute the PLO guerrillas and their leaders were safely out of west Beirut. The truth is that a solemn pledge was given to the PLO for the safety of the unarmed civilians, which included women and infants as well as men. In varying degrees all of them bear responsibility for the fact that the so-called “law and order” they brought to Lebanon was a form of holo-caust, instead.

The only serious opposition to the barbarism is seen in the mass demonstrations within Israel itself, demanding the removal of the Begin-Sharon government. But that, too, is only a beginning. Even if the Labor and Peace parties gain power, that will not change the state-capitalist nature of Israel which resulted in the neo-fascist Begin-Sharon regime. Nor can we forget that the reason he gained a clear majority was due to the support of Guela Cohen’s extreme Right party, Tehiya. In exchange for its three votes on July 25, Tehiya was guaranteed several thousand new homes in the occupied region; seven new settlements on the West Bank; and General Sharon’s sponsorship of the whole idea of settling the West Bank as if it were part of Israel.

It was precisely for that aim of annexing the West Bank that the latest imperialist venture into Lebanon was taken. It is not just that PLO Begin-Sharon are out to destroy, but the very idea of Palestinian national self-determination. The whole talk of so-called autonomy in the Camp David Peace Treaty was a sham and a snare. This is clearly not the time for any “half-way houses.” The Begin-Sharon government must be overthrown!

The events are moving so fast that we no sooner confront one horror than we are confronted with a worse atrocity. Thus the latest atrocities came only three days after Israel’s invasion of west Beirut that immediately followed the assassination of the President-elect, Bashir Gemayel. Far from its claim that its mission was “the restoration of law and order” in the “sovereign state of Lebanon,” Israel’s goal was the same as in its first invasion of Lebanon in June—not the “sovereignty” of Lebanon, but the establishment of a puppet regime there, under the illusion that its army could destroy the idea of freedom.

Gemayel’s assassination and the fact that all of the “international peace-keeping forces”—the U.S., France and Italy—had been pulled out, made the original Israeli aim of installing its own government into power in Lebanon seemingly easier. Bashir Gemayel, on whom Israel seemed fully dependent, had not only begun to say that it was necessary to get all foreign troops out of Lebanon, but was beginning to look to the U.S., since it, too, was criticizing its prime ally in the Middle East, Israel. Even before Gemayel made these new sounds, it was clear that Israel’s support of Gemayel wasn’t as total as his rhetoric made it appear.

Ever since 1978, it was Major Saad Haddad who was Israel’s direct puppet. Israel’s support of Gemayel was based on: 1.) the fact that he had the Phalangist Army behind him (which Israel had largely armed); and 2.) the fact that he had some indigenous support. But ever since the June invasion of Lebanon it was Major Haddad, whose ambition had always been to carve out a piece of Lebanon with him as lord over it, that General Sharon had been encouraging. (1) Israel had been artificially swelling Haddad’s militias by taking arms from the Lebanese Army in the South and turning them over to Haddad, who began to talk of increasing his “army” from a few thousand to fifty thousand.

Did Israel think that the invasion of Beirut could accomplish its aim of totally destroying the PLO? Even that Great Delusion—which matches the Grand Illusion that an insignificant puppet like Haddad could be installed as ruler over the whole of Lebanon—did not seem to exhaust General Sharon’s schema for the Middle East.

The fantastic lengths to which Begin-Sharon were willing to go included entering the Soviet Embassy itself, and risking nothing short of a confrontation between the two super-powers. Even if that proves to have been only a symbolic gesture with which they wished to threaten the U.S., does Israel wish to imitate the Nazis and translate “Deutschland uber alles” as “Eretz Israel uber alles”? The latest events bring new urgency to the Marxist-Humanist Perspectives which were set at the Labor Day Convention of News and Letters Committees, in which the analysis of Israel’s first barbarous invasion was tightly integrated not only to a total opposition to Begin-Sharon, but to making that total opposition
Manitou-Humanist Writings on the Middle East

The immediate, urgent question now is: What kind of regime in Lebanon? Does anyone doubt that Begin-Sharon wanted that small-time neo-fascist, Bashir Gemayel to become its President? What really needed to be done to ensure that genuine national liberation is the predominant demand and that none will stand for any colonization anywhere—be it by Britain in the Malvaks/Falklands or Israel in Lebanon and the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Let’s keep in mind that precisely because Thatcher thought she could revive British chauvinistic patriotism—especially when it hit a U.S. supporter so militarily dominant over technologically backward lands like Argentina—she thought a military victory would assure her holding onto the Falklands/Malvaks. Nothing could be further from the truth. The reason that even militarist neo-fascist Argentina could threaten Britain with transformation of her military victory into a defeat, and Argentina’s military defeat into a victory, is the Third World’s implacable opposition to neo-colonialism; it will not allow Britain to keep its war booty.

Here, too, philosophy is no abstraction. Its concretization, as politicalization, warns that whole New Lefts must not step into half-way houses and shrug off that men’s deep sensitivity to Third World desires for freedom unless they are willing to transform that desire into an outright revolution, before it meets the blow that is shaping the fate of the New Left which uncritically accepts the unfinished Latin American revolutions as if that is the answer—i.e. what will destroy imperialist capitalism, and what issue of Contemporary Marxism (Winter, 1990), edited by Immanuel Wallerstein, in which Samir Amin, in an essay on Nicaragua, concluded that the primary task is “rearticulation of the economy.” No one needs a reminder that the counter-revolution in Poland, headed by General Jaruzelski, is using precisely that excuse for destroying Solidarity.

Why fighting against “what it is” is incomplete without the corollary, what one is for.

Because the economic and political crises wracking the capitalist-imperialist world are so horrendous—whether we look at the acknowledged, official 10 percent unemployment (which is not 10 percent but 17 percent in industrial centers, and fully 50 percent among Black youth—and which characterizes not only the U.S. but circles the entire globe in the 1975-76 crisis) or the industrialized nations, or whether we look at the many recently ongoing wars, from Iran-Iraq to the Falklands/Malvaks to Israel’s genocidal invasion of Lebanon—it is all too tempting to express oneself solely in opposition to what is, without ever specifying what one is for, so weighted down does one become by all these crises crying out for an end.

History, however, warns us of other critical periods which give us historic proof that mere opposition to such monstrous degradation does not lead to new sociality of contrary. It only assures the transformation of that type of base opposition into one form or another of a half-way house. That is true both when we look at the failure of bourgeois democracy and when we look at fascism. Both brought on World War II. Such a victory over fascism only laid the ground for the transformation of state-capitalism—Gaullism as well as Stalinism. Indeed, state-capitalism became a universal.

As we know from WW I, even the magnificent opposition that was successful—the Russian Revolution—did not spread beyond national borders, ended in the transformation of the first workers’ state into its opposite, state-capitalism.

Today, we cannot evade asking: What Now? Is the absolute opposite of half, or just one more narrow nationalism? In our age, when a nuclear war threatens civilization as we have known it, we cannot, must not, accept half-way houses. If we do, we get right back to right national holocaust. Rather, the immediate crises of today are both in the “Love Canals” of the world and at the point of production....(2)

We cannot satisfy ourselves with detailing only what we would like to happen, imagining stories. They surely abound in Israel’s invasion of Lebanon. (3) Many other stories, I’m sure, can also be told of the FLO and its fantastic covenant “to drive the Israelis into the sea.” Nor should our support of the Palestinians for self-determination and the FLO as a bargaining agent lead us away from re-examining what happens to aborted revolutions—in this case, specifically Lebanon and specifically as aided by the FLO in the 1975-76 Civil War there. Which is why we correctly entitle our Philosophical-Political Letter (August 6, 1976): “The Test Not Only of the FLO But of the Whole Left.”

Because the Left did not meet the challenge but followed the FLO is one substantial reason for the current crisis today. Just at the point when there was a near success by the indigenous Lebanese Left, and the outcome of the 1975-6 Civil War hung in the balance, the FLO insisted that the only course must be Palestinian non-ruler-oppressors represented by the so-called Christian, i.e. neo-fascist, Phalangists, but on Israel alone, though at the moment Israel was...
nowhere present in Lebanon and Syria was all ready to invade. It is Syria the PLO had dubbed "liberators" instead of a new imperialistic force. The great tragedy was that the whole Left—indigenous Lebanese under Jumblatt, Stalinists, Trotskyist—followed the PLO lead. Here is what we wrote in that Political-Philosophic Letter:

"...the New Left, born in the 1960s, so disdainful of theory (which it forever thinks it can pick up 'en route'), has a strange attitude toward imperialism. It is as if imperialism were not the natural outgrowth of monopoly capitalism, but was a 'conspiracy' organized by a single imaginary center, rather as the Nazis used to refer to the Judeo-Catholic-Masonic Alliance, or Communists under Stalin to the conspiracy of the Trotskyists and Rightists in league with the imperialist secret service'...

"And even, it should now be added, as Khomeini not refers to the U.S. and Israel as the Great Satan.

"Evidently nationalism of the so-called Third World is of itself revolutionary even when it is under the banner of a king, a shah, or the emirates, or the Syrian Army. Thereby they canonize nationalism, even when it is void of working class character, as national liberation.

"It is not that class is the sole characteristic of national liberation movements that revolutionaries can support. It is that the working class nature is its essence and it is that the revolutionary and international impact emerges from masses in motion...

"This does not mean that we give up the struggle for self-determination, Palestinian especially. It is that we do not narrow our vision of the revolutionary struggle for a totally different world, on truly new Humanists foundations, the first necessity of which is the unity of philosophy and revolution."

As has now become painfully clear, Begin-Sharon, bent on the mad delusion that an Army can kill the idea of freedom, were not stopped even though their invasion of west Beirut assured a clear road for the massacre of hundreds upon hundreds of Palestinians by Major Haddad and the breakaway Phalangists. Just as the Polish masses never forgave Russia during World War II for staying outside the gates of Warsaw in 1944, waiting for the Nazis to complete their destruction before they moved into "save" them, so the masses of the world will never forgive Begin's Israel for the Lebanon massacre.

What is necessary is to see that the opposition to this horror does not stop with being against Begin-Sharon. It must demonstrate what it is for—which can only be the total uprooting of the state-private capitalism that brought this horror into being, and the unfolding of the kind of "revolution in permanence" that Marx projected, and will not stop until we have truly human relations.

1. See two articles that develop this point, both in The
   New York Times, Sept. 16, 1983: "Gemayel's Impotence" by Guy Slibon; and "Living by the Sword" by Anthony Lewis.

2. See "A Worker Looks at the Anti-Nuclear Movement" in our Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin (excerpt to appear in the November N&L; and my letter to the Youth in Pre-Convention Discussion Bulletin Number 4. Both are available from News & Letters.

3. In her interview with that neo-fascist, so-called
   Defense Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, Oriana Fallaci reveals his insane, night-marish vision: "Israeli strategic interests...must be broadened to include countries such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, regions such as the Persian Gulf and Africa, particularly the countries of north and central Africa...