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# Gaza conflict: only socialism can lay basis for Palestinian state

by Shaun Arendse



South African protestors against the war, Potch.

On August 26, the capitalist regime in Israel ended its seven week assault on the Palestinian territory of Gaza. At the end of this one-sided conflict over 2,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, including large numbers of children, lay dead. So too did 70 Israelis, almost all occupying soldiers. The infrastructure of Gaza has been smashed. Over

half a million Palestinians have been made homeless and it could take up to a year to restore water and electricity.

Progressive forces the world over have been disgusted by the brutality of the Israeli regime. Protests have been seen worldwide, including in South Africa. The hideous treatment of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime is particularly hard felt here. The

apartheid-style segregation and discrimination that the Palestinians face both in Israel and the occupied West Bank and Gaza are all too familiar. Even the United States government – the prime supporters of Israel – were forced to hypocritically criticise the assault, all the better to hide their continuing support

for Israel from their own war-weary population.

Protestors in South Africa demanded that the ANC government expel the Israeli ambassador and stop trade with Israel. Whilst ANC spokespeople verbally condemned the assault, they refused to take even these minimal steps. After twenty years as the government of capitalist South Africa, the ANC is more concerned to protect their big-business friends who profit from trade with Israel. They betray their own liberation-struggle history in foreign policy as they do domestically.

## Future conflict guaranteed

Just days after the ceasefire, Israel annexed a further 1,000 acres of Palestinian land, in the biggest land-grab in a generation. The Israeli regime will continue with their policy of dispossessing the Palestinian people regardless of the ceasefire. A response from the Palestinian masses, sooner or later, is guaranteed and eventually open warfare will resume.

But the methods used by Hamas – the Islamist based ruling party in Gaza and no friend to the working class – are proving

ineffective because they do not rely on the mass participation of the working class in mass united struggle. The Palestinians have the categorical right to armed self-defence in the face of Israeli aggression. But the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel, whilst being militarily ineffective and a propaganda boost for the Israeli regime, who claim their aggression is an act of self-defence, excludes the mass of Palestinian people from the struggle for their own liberation.

Strikes, mass protests and mass action to dismantle the security walls and check-points around Gaza, organised by grass-roots community committees, who must also take the arming of the population under their democratic control, is the only method of struggle that opens the possibility of the Palestinian people having a genuine and democratic say on the terms of any future peace agreement. The alternative will be an eventual compromise between the Israeli regime and the pro-capitalist Palestinian elite that first and foremost secures their common class interests to the detriment of the Palestinian working class.

In this recent conflict, the Israeli

regime was able to rally the majority of the Israeli-Jewish working class behind their assault on Gaza. But nevertheless, a significant anti-war movement in Israel organised several major demonstrations against the war, uniting Jews and Arabs in protest. The sister-section of the DSM in Israel/Palestine – Socialist Struggle Movement – played an active role in these protests.

Socialism will be central to any meaningful self-determination for the Palestinians. A Palestinian state based on Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, on the basis of capitalism, will remain poverty stricken enclaves. A socialist solution must include recognition of the right to self-determination of all nations in the region, including Israel. But upon the basis of socialism, where the planned sharing of resources and land would be a possibility, elected and accountable representatives of working class people on both sides of the national divide would be able to sit down together and come to a genuine democratic solution that could bring peace and self-determination to the long-suffering people of Palestine

At the end of September 2013, the City of Joburg launched its so-called Operation Clean Sweep, targeting the 8000 street traders who make a living selling everything from eggs to electronics on the city streets. The Metro police chased away both the traders licenced by the city and those it had previously declared 'illegal' and confiscated their stock. Only in rare cases were any itemised slips issued, as per the City's own regulations – reducing these actions to simple theft. Many traders were financially ruined after spending all they had on stocking up month-end. But this was only the beginning of hardships that went on until the end of the year. With their families, there were about 40 000 people left destitute for the duration of the Clean Sweep.

The Workers and Socialist Party (WASP) was contacted by street traders of the African Traders Committee (now the African Traders Organisation – ATO) a couple of days into the eviction campaign and immediately began preparing for a march.

WASP came together with the SAITF (South African Informal Traders Forum) which also wanted to initiate mass action, and also reached out to SAITF's rival organisations such as One Voice and SANTRA and pulled them along in the several marches and pickets that followed. In the biggest march at the end of October, about 5000 street traders took part. WASP also made contact with the Socio-Economic Rights Institute, a legal NGO which took up the case in court. Having at first lost in High Court, SERI took it further to the Constitutional Court, and won there on December 5, 2013 – the traders had not only defeated the City of Joburg but also one of Mayor Parks Tau's personal prestige projects.

Izwi labasebenzi spoke to **Matron Mhlanga**, street trader and a leader of the ATO for an update a year later. Matron was also one of WASP's election candidates.



## Street traders' won against city, struggle continues

*How was the battle won against the City?*

We could win in court against the City because they were actually the ones who were breaking the law, but again that was only possible because of the mass action, the marches and mass meetings that we organised, because we were holding everyone together up until the victory, making sure we called the divide-and-rule bluffs of the City. For example the City tried to play on xenophobia, exploiting the fact that many traders have their origins outside the borders, so we had to work very hard to counter that and unite everyone. The Workers and Socialist Party played a very important role in this.

*What do you think was the most important lesson for the street traders?*

That they need to be united and organised. And also that they need to make sure that they attend every meeting that the City calls, because that is where most of the decisions are taken against the issues of traders or trading in the city.

*And for yourself?*

I learned that nothing is permanent in the street, that we don't need to relax but we need to stay united and organised, because the more united we are the more we'll be able to overcome any challenges in the street.

*What has happened since the ConCourt victory?*

Since we won in ConCourt, traders have gone back to their trading places. The City went back to the drawing board. They have come up with what they call a Roadmap which they say will guide them on how to reorganise street trading in the inner city. This time we have been allowed to make input as street traders. We are still in Phase One, so we are yet to see how that input is going to be reflected in the plan. What we know it that they want to declare some streets prohibited, while we don't know which ones, and the City says they are prepared to accommodate everyone, we don't know how they plan to do that.

*What are the challenges facing street traders now?*

That time of the Clean Sweep, the shelters were removed, and now when it's raining people who cannot afford to buy a tent – they can't trade. Another challenge is that the remarking of the old spaces meant that other traders were marked out of their spaces, and in other streets they didn't mark at all so those traders have found themselves 'illegal' now, though they had legal spaces before the Clean Sweep, and they are harassed every day by Metro cops.

*What is the way forward from here, the way you see it?*

The City needs to come up with a plan that will be able to accommodate everyone and work for everyone. As traders we need to keep the fire burning, continue with the struggle. I think we need to raise our sights, and build an organisation that will be able to represent every trader and it needs to go beyond blocks and even cities to build a force that can raise a united voice of all street traders in the country.