

Obscuring the class nature of the Islamic fundamentalists

Another issue with the elections is what happens if the Islamic fundamentalists come to power? Since Jason considers defense of the mini-state authority to be paramount, he does not call for a struggle to bring down even an Islamic rule. Instead he whistles past the graveyard. He doubts that Palestinians will “freely hand them (their rights — Mk) over to religious fanatics given a democratic choice where they are only one of several options” because “that sort of thing flourishes best amongst a poorly educated people with no democratic traditions and little political sophistication.” Of course the liberals of Germany said the same thing about Hitler coming to power. Meanwhile, Jason himself claims that Hamas’ policies have “endeared them to a section of the Palestinian masses” and their ideology “has a powerful appeal.”

And while Jason doubts Palestinians would elect Hamas, he does his best to prettify them. He gets upset with me for pointing out that “Hamas represents the Islamic fundamentalist section of the bourgeoisie and would like, for now at least, a share of the power and privileges the PLO has.” He says this is an attempt to “reduce Hamas’ motivations down to that of a venal, corrupt bourgeoisie strata” and doesn’t recognize that most of Hamas’ flaws are “ideological.” Well, I hadn’t talked about how “venal” or “corrupt” Hamas was. It is Jason who tries to make the degree of corruptness the central issue. This allows him to dodge the question of what class interests the Islamic fundamentalist organizations represent. In fact, he points with pride how his analysis contradicts the idea of “class issues primary, everything else secondary.” Jason thinks the main issue is whether the personal motivation of some Islamic fundamentalist leader is to amass a fortune, not that Hamas represents one section of bourgeois class tyranny trying to displace the present bourgeois regime. And by obscuring the class nature of Hamas, Jason winds up portraying the program of Hamas as little more than spiritual contemplation and kindly charity work.

The way Jason looks at things, Hamas’ ideological concerns

mean it won’t defend the capitalist order whereas in reality an Islamic regime will mean the most backward and suffocating sort of capitalist order. If the religious fanaticism of Hamas means they are not advancing a political agenda, then I suppose the Pope and the anti-abortion zealots have no political agenda either.

He is also quite enamored by the “network of social service organizations” of the Islamic fundamentalists for their “concrete support for Palestinians.” Jason considers this evidence that Hamas is not corrupt and that which class interests it represents is a minor concern. Yes, some of the inadequate international relief aid goes through Hamas. But reactionaries have often used similar aid programs to buy a little good will while supporting social orders of extreme oppression. Indeed, Jason himself noted the narrow political infighting among all the groups distributing aid in his May 10 document. There he states that “charity operations are seen as the territory of one particular faction,” for example, “administrators are pressured to hire workers of one particular group” and “control over limited resources is becoming more important than what uses are made of the resources.” Doesn’t sound like mere disinterested charity, does it? But for Jason, the main thing is that Hamas doesn’t have as many luxury cars as Arafat’s cronies.

Jason’s distorted view of class analysis

By detaching their ideological “flaws” from their class basis, Jason assists Hamas in presenting itself as an organization of the downtrodden. He just scoffs at the class analysis of Hamas as “class reductionism.” For Jason, there are just a lot of different oppressions that “operate simultaneously and in a totally intertwined manner.” But he avoids the fact that the root cause of all these forms of oppression are various class interests and that different class interests are the underlying cause of different trends within each form of struggle against oppression. Hence when Jason hears about class analysis being applied to, say, national oppression or women’s oppression, he can only imagine it to mean obliterating all distinctions between various forms of oppression, of reducing things to absurdity.

In fact in his June article, Jason says flat out that he considers Marxism an inadequate tool for analysis, arguing that it is “only one of many useful tools when looking at non-class (race and gender) questions” and is a “dismal failure” “on questions dealing with an individual’s spiritual needs.” Of course since Jason classifies radical Islamic fundamentalism as basically “cultural oppression,” it is no wonder he considers pointing out the class nature of Hamas to be a dismal failure, as “not the way to examine the threat they pose.” Marx was well known for pointing out the underlying basis of religious conflicts in Europe several centuries ago was the clash between rising capitalism and the old feudal order. But Jason, who assures the world it is the stand of his opponents that “actually misses the essence of the way Marx used dialectical and historical materialism,” can dismiss class interests by referring to religious motivations.