

How and Why the International Community has Failed in Gaza.

A speech to be given by the Chairman of the Lipman-Miliband Trust at their annual meeting. In attendance are representatives of the United Kingdom's Department for Education, as well as members of the UNESCO education outreach department.

Good Evening, and thank you all for attending this, our annual meeting. I want to thank especially the representatives from the Department for Education, and the members of the UNESCO education outreach department for attending our meeting this year. I want to open this evening on a different note than usual however. It is no secret that the last year has seen a massive increase in left wing protest activity on a global scale, since the full scale conflict in Gaza began following the tragic events of October 7th.

The Israeli response to this attack has been utterly disproportionate, with almost 35,000 civilians killed, mostly women and children. Planned offensives into the population centres of Southern Gaza will only lead to a massive increase in the already horrifying number of dead and wounded. Despite all this, international support for Israel from the Western powers, such as the United Kingdom has remained strong, with weapons shipments continuing with no conditions or promises being made - and kept - by the Israeli government to ensure that civilian life will be protected. All the while, the international community has remained silent on the horrific actions of Israeli Occupation Forces in the West Bank against the Palestinian population, forcibly removing them from their homes and demolishing entire neighbourhoods. It is hard not to draw a comparison with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in terms of proportionate response by the West, as many left wing academics and activists have done. If the Russian Federation was engaged in such blatant and visible war crimes as the Israeli government, it is certain that they would be met with international fury. Why, then, is it acceptable for the Israeli government and its military to flaunt international law in such a way?

To this end we must examine the extent of the support that the Israeli state has been lent by the Western powers, most notable among them being the American, British, Canadian and French governments. Weapons shipments to Israel over the past 70 years have entrenched Israel's position as a formidable military obstacle to achieving peace in the Middle East. International diplomatic support has seen Israel ignore over a dozen UN resolutions with no repercussions. It shows that some of Israel's strongest supporters are on the permanent board of the security council, as any reasonable call for a ceasefire proposed by either the Palestinian delegation, or any other state in the United Nations has been vetoed by either collective or singular blocking of the resolution by one or all of the aforementioned states. At this organisation, we aim to provide funding for education and socialist education policies around the world. However, from the country that gave the world the renowned academic Edward Said, there are now no Universities left. Israeli forces have destroyed every centre of higher learning and educational specialisation in Gaza, crippling the ability of the nation to educate and advance its population.

Long term, this will impact on the number of doctors, surgeons, teachers, scientists, geologists, academics, and a whole host of other professions that a developed economy is reliant on. Without a developed economy, how on earth can Gaza rebuild itself? Without trained personnel, how can the desperately needed hospital staff aid patients, in hospitals which are already under direct attack and overflowing with those seeking aid? How can we, as an academic institution, live with ourselves knowing that our colleagues are suffering under bombardment and attack because they are simply trying to advance the Gazan population's higher education?

It is perhaps not hard to see why the left wing movement has been so vehemently against the attacks by Israel on its smaller, defenceless neighbour in Gaza. The Israeli forces have targeted Universities, UN aid distribution centres and academic facilities, all with minimal response or condemnation from the international community. Continuing the trend of refusing to condemn Israel for its crimes against humanity, and protecting it in the United Nations by vetoing any resolution to stop its brutal attacks against Gaza. As an academic institution, it is vital that where we see oppression and violence we must stand up and call it out. Especially as the destruction of fellow academic institutions, of all levels, go ahead with a total lack of condemnation from the permanent security council members.

Now, you may be asking yourselves - what can we do? What power lies with us, what can any one of us realistically do to impact on the situation in the Middle East? Political apathy is a tactic often used to keep us from understanding the impact that our voices have on national policy. That is why I have chosen to speak on this subject at our annual meeting, and it has inspired much greater acts of bravery and compassion, such as the statements made by Aaron Bushnell moments before his death. When someone feels so powerless that the only way they can see a change in national policy is by sacrificing themselves, we must ask ourselves about the truly democratic nature of the world order. The powers that be have tricked us into believing that we have no control over world affairs, that states must exist and be allowed to act as they wish. With the undemocratic nature of many states, it is often that governments act against the will of the people, but the people are powerless to remove them. That is not to say it is impossible, but the effort of removing an unpopular government is more difficult than ever in this increasingly militarised part of the world.

A way to show our lack of agreement with the policies of our governments, especially with their actions toward Israel, is to support the protest movements growing across University campuses worldwide. We have now all seen how brutally the police forces in the United States have reacted to students participating in encampments on their own campuses. Many of these students have been attacked violently and brutally for simply protesting against the actions of their government. It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge the brave actions undertaken by these students as they stand up against the militarised police forces of the United States, and of the students in other countries facing similar fates. Mass protest has been used for centuries to display a desire for change, be it for Queer Rights, to emancipation and equality. The Suffragette movement in the United Kingdom lacked the political support right off the bat to make a real dent in Parliamentary politics. It took the brave actions of groups of women to bring awareness to their cause and win over the population. The same was seen with Martin Luther King Jr.'s movement to end segregation and Jim Crow laws in the United States, and in countless other protests for human rights.

There is no reason to see the movements against Israel as any different. Protesting in favour of human rights has been a staple of the left-wing movement for centuries, and has been the backbone for many of the most popular and powerful left-wing movements. From Russia to France, and South Wales to Ethiopia, left-wing movements have always aimed to advance the cause of human rights, and to uplift the voices of those who cannot form a platform due to the oppression of themselves. We, as academics, are privileged to receive the platform that we have, and the way that we should be using it is to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Only then will we be able to claim that we have used our platform for change.

Actions such as this have been undertaken by academics throughout history, with the most famous remaining household names among the academic world. Edward Said remains the most poignant example of this, with his writings on Orientalism being among the most influential post-colonial writings in history. His beliefs were shaped by the Israeli occupation of his home nation, Palestine, and were the main inspiration for his landmark work. Towards the end of his life, he reached the belief that the only way to ensure peace in the Levant region was to advocate for the creation of a multiethnic state in Palestine, composed of all the different faiths and nationalities that call it home. Further advocating for an ethnostate, which the Zionist Israeli foundations call for, on either side, will just lead to greater suffering.

It is important to note that Zionism was an idea thought up before the Second World War and the horrors of the Holocaust, by British diplomats and politicians. Christian Zionism, as it was then called, was the brainchild of then British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. His work laid the foundations for the Balfour Declaration, a decision which led to a massive influx of Jews into the region, leading to the massive destabilisation that has since then defined the history of the two states of Israel and Palestine. The only way that this can be achieved is through international pressure on the United Nations to act in a peacekeeping role, and ensure that any further conflict is impossible through mediation and compromise. We cannot allow the horrors of the 1940's to repeat themselves, but we also cannot allow ourselves to stand by and watch yet another great horror take place in front of us. Why should a region already torn apart by war be subjugated to yet another period of massive destruction? Why has the UN, yet again, failed to find a peaceful solution to this crisis? It is not because of the ideals of the organisation, but because of the biased application of these.

As the world watched in Korea, the United States was more than willing to use the United Nations as cover for imperialistic actions. Support for states such as South Korea, which remained a dictatorship until the late 1950's, and Apartheid in South Africa, not to mention the interventions against states such as Vietnam and Laos, as well as in South America, have shown that the United States can act with impunity against its enemies with no repercussions. Other states on the security council are not much better, with France's actions in Algeria and Equatorial Africa leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths, and the failed British Partition of India and Pakistan resulting in massive humanitarian casualties and regional rivalries that have never healed. It cannot be argued that the United Nations has succeeded, because it has clearly not. But it has the chance to redeem itself, if only partially, in Gaza.

Finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, and the return to peace, should be the primary aim of the United Nations and all its partner organisations. But ensuring that a conflict of the scale and brutality that we are witnessing never happens again is paramount. And the only way that we can ensure that, is to remove the military threats to peace. A unitary state in Palestine, supervised and supported by the United Nations, should be established to aid in creating an equal society and repairing the damage done by the occupying Israeli forces to the entire region of Palestine. This cannot happen, obviously, without the support of both parties. That is why official, genuine, discussions must be held by elected officials from both sides. It is also why the Israeli government must immediately remove occupation from all of its neighbour states, such as Syria, Lebanon and Palestine.

It would be hypocritical to say that this is a small task. There is no secret about the instability of the entire region, and the damage done by the conflict in Gaza extends far beyond the reaches of the Israeli constructed prison walls that keep it imprisoned. Our role as leftists and academics is to uplift and aid those who need our help. That is what our comrades in campuses across the United States and the world are trying to do, and we should follow in their brave footsteps. Regardless of the fact that they knew they would be attacked by the militarised police forces of their government, they still chose to stand up for and support their beliefs, sometimes to the detriment of their own health. If you take nothing else away from this, it should be that with all the means at our disposal we should try to make a difference, and that by working together we can achieve much. Struggles throughout history have shown us that when we work alongside our comrades with an end goal in mind, we can do whatever we set our minds to. That is the message we must send to our leaders, to the United Nations, and to the political élite that guide international organisations with the means to make a difference. We cannot allow this catastrophe in Gaza to continue any more, and the cycle of senseless brutal violence must be brought to an end, lest even more human life be laid to waste. In good conscience, any politician or national figure must immediately call for a permanent, lasting ceasefire, and we all must do what we can to end the brutal slaughter of Palestinian people by the Israeli state. There is no other choice available to us as humans, as leftists, and as comrades. Thank you.