

Jackson and his supporters into sharp opposition with the main thrust of imperialist policy on almost every major issue of the day nationally and internationally.

Yet it was no accident that Jackson's Middle East position gave rise to a particularly sharp polarization with the U.S. bourgeoisie. By opposing U.S. intervention and Israeli expansionism, and by calling for negotiations with the PLO and recognition of the right to a Palestinian homeland, Jackson is throwing up a major political and ideological challenge to a strategic vital interest of both imperialism and Zionism.

Jackson's basic point is that if we are to have peace and justice in the Middle East, the U.S. must pursue principled and friendly relations with the 22 Arab states and their 100 million people, and not treat the Arabs as enemies while maintaining exclusive ties with Israel and its 4 million Jews. This is a direct hit on U.S. imperialism's Middle East strategy of using Israel as its main local policeman against the Arab people's striving toward national democracy. And it challenges forthrightly the racist ideological dehumanization of the Arabs that justifies that strategy.

Equally important, the Rainbow Coalition has put the Middle East issue squarely on the progressive agenda, affirming that one cannot be a reliable advocate of peace and justice unless one is prepared to fight the imperialist/Zionist axis and support Palestinian national rights. The campaign showed that the role of the «dispossessed,» especially the minority communities, in the struggle against Zionism cannot be underestimated.

These are signal developments given the longstanding conciliation of liberal Zionism by many U.S. progressives. Zionism is a powerful political and ideological bulwark of the bourgeoisie that stands at the juncture of racism, national chauvinism, and jingoism. Yet it is particularly insidious and widespread, even among the progressives, because it parades under the banner of «the struggle against anti-Semitism.»

Zionism is therefore a mortal danger both to world peace and to the struggle for democracy and socialism internal to the U.S. This vantage point is absolutely key in order to properly clarify the stakes involved and the formidable class interests that must be confronted in this bitter fight.

Imperialism's stake in the region

Jackson's Middle East position touches an exposed raw nerve of U.S. global strategy. One of the cardinal tenets of this strategy is that keeping the Middle East firmly in the imperialist orbit is absolutely essential to the survival of the imperialist system as a whole. Within this, Israel is assigned the role of chief local surrogate. Israel is, in essence, a military garrison state charged with defending U.S. dominance in the Middle East from the threat posed by the Arab people's national liberation struggle.

There are two basic reasons why the Middle East is a region of such qualitatively special interest to U.S. imperialism. The first, of course, has to do with Middle East oil, though not simply because of gigantic U.S. oil company profits. The bigger picture is that, since WW II when oil replaced coal as the main energy source, the advanced capitalist economies of Western Europe and Japan have become fundamentally dependent on Middle East oil. 65% of Western Europe's petroleum comes from the Middle East, as does 80% of Japan's.

While the U.S. itself is not directly dependent on Middle East oil, its concern is no less compelling. Without ready access to Middle East oil, the entire world imperialist economy



Jesse Jackson at a press conference with Barbara Lubin, of Jews for Jackson, and Osama Doumani, of Arab-Americans for Jackson.

would be qualitatively destabilized, including the U.S. economy itself. Moreover, the U.S. role as military and political guarantor of oil to Western Europe and Japan gives it enormous leverage over its erstwhile allies. After all, the U.S. still largely controls Middle Eastern oil through the refining process and transportation.

The second, and more longstanding strategic stake in the Middle East has to do with geopolitics. The region's location at the intersection of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and the great waterways of the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean means that it holds sway over key naval and trade routes. It is thus of inestimable political, military, and economic value. Not only does the U.S. use this leverage against its imperialist rivals, but also as a threat to the Soviet Union's vital access to the Mediterranean.

For these reasons, the U.S. sees the Middle East as a critical battleground in the international class struggle, a front which it is openly prepared to «defend» with the full weight of its economic influence and military arsenal, including nuclear weaponry.

However, unable to impose outright colonial forms, the U.S. must seek and cultivate allies in the region to serve as its surrogates. In addition to Israel, its commitment to the reactionary Arab regimes in the area—especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia—is massive. These regimes, while standing in conflict with Israel's unrelenting expansion into their territories, are nonetheless completely tied to imperialism. Although they posture as champions of Arab nationalism, the reactionary Arab classes who hold power in these countries are increasingly impelled to seek a U.S.-sponsored accommodation with Israel.

Still it is the U.S./Israeli axis that stands as the centerpiece of imperialist defense of its massive interests in the region. The U.S. commitment to Israel is staggering, constituting the largest single sector of all U.S. military and economic assistance. More than \$3 billion per year, nearly one-third of the entire U.S. foreign aid budget, goes to the land of kibbutz-owned swimming pools and Jews-only «settlement towns» to shore up U.S. influence in the Middle East. And this is supplemented by another \$2 billion from private U.S. sources.

As Joseph Harsh wrote in the Christian Science Monitor: «Few countries have ever been as dependent on another as Israel on the U.S...Israel's major weapons come from the U.S. either as gifts or on long-term, low-interest loans that few seriously expect to be repaid in full. Israel's survival is underwritten and subsidized from Washington. Without American arms Israel would soon lose the 'quantitative and qualitative advan-