

# The Left (USA): A response to Jonah ben Avraham's "Support Palestinians when they fight..."

Monday 27 November 2023, by [LA BOTZ Dan](#), [SHALOM Stephen R.](#) (Date first published: 24 November 2023).

**Dan La Botz and Stephen R. Shalom respond critically to a recent article by Jonah Ben Avraham.**

In the midst of Israel's horrific slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza, it would seem ill-timed to engage in debate with other members of the pro-Palestinian Left. But when a writer chooses to denounce as "pro-settler" those who uphold the fundamental Left position against killing innocent civilians, a response is required. And when a leftist dismisses the humanity of Israeli civilians as the "suffering of the Israeli settlers," it is important to point out how this does a tremendous disservice to both the Left and the Palestinian cause.

The recent article in *Tempest* titled "[Support Palestinians when they fight: Not just when they die](#)" by Jonah ben Avraham praises Hamas' October 7 attack: "In the images of fences toppling and resistance spreading—particularly throughout the Arab world—we saw a glimpse of new possibilities." This is our vision of a new world? Slaughtered civilians? How does he believe this attack came about: "Last month, inmates of the Zionist state's de facto concentration camp in the Gaza Strip executed a desperate, yet powerfully courageous, escape." Yes, Israel had turned Gaza into a concentration camp. But no one "escaped." These were not enslaved people breaking their chains and fleeing north. The planners of this action could not have failed to anticipate the horrendous and criminal Israeli retaliation that is currently slaughtering the people of Gaza. Sometimes desperate people spontaneously explode. But October 7 was not spontaneous. It was the carefully planned action of a rightwing, religious fundamentalist organization.

Ben Avraham seems to share with the Israeli government the view that Hamas and the Palestinians are one and the same. For the state of Israel, this means that Palestinians can be slaughtered in revenge for Hamas's actions. For ben Avraham it means that our obligation to support Palestinians' just cause requires us to support Hamas. Hamas won an election in 2006, but hasn't faced voters in the ensuing 17 years. Pre-October 7, 2023 [polls show](#) that two thirds of Gazans had little or no trust in Hamas and only about a quarter considered Hamas their preferred party. Hamas rules Gaza dictatorially, allowing no opportunity for democratic participation. Hamas has long favored attacks on civilians—from bombs in restaurants to indiscriminate rocket fire—that the Left has opposed for its immorality and its strategic idiocy, as it strengthened the Israeli rightwing and discredited the Palestinian cause. And in recent years there has been direct support of Hamas from the Netanyahu government, as a way to build up a counter-weight to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank to keep Palestinians divided.

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On October 7, Hamas' attack involved the killing of hundreds of civilians, including children. Over two hundred were taken as hostages, many of them civilians including children. Attacks on innocent civilians are war crimes and contrary to international humanitarian law and also contrary to basic leftist values. Yes, it is true that for 75 years Israel has often done as much and worse, and it is doing far worse right now, but that does not lessen the heinous nature of Hamas's attack, which Ben Avraham, unfortunately, is loath to mention.

Ben Avraham tells us that Hamas's victims were settlers and those who mourn them "pro-settler." (He's not referring to the West Bank settlers, but to any Israeli.) Yes, Israel is a settler state, as are many other states in the world, and not just the major capitalist powers—Latin America for example. But should any leftist be morally indifferent to the slaughter of children because they are descendants of settlers?

Ben Avraham adopts old leftist language that should be retired from our liberatory lexicon such as "by any means necessary" and "unconditional support." Socialists do not believe that "any means" are permissible in the struggle for justice. Ends and means mutually condition each other. Murdering civilians, especially children, will make achieving a common struggle for a new society more difficult, perhaps impossible for another generation or two. That is true of the October 7 attack and is equally true, and much more horrendous, in the case of Israel's mass murder in Gaza. We should also ban the term "unconditional support." How can we not have conditions relating to our support? If a movement, even a movement of the oppressed, does things that are contrary to socialist principles and contrary to our ultimate goals, how can we not be critical?

The author writes, "This moment is a crystal-clear demonstration of the importance and meaning of socialist internationalism." This suggests international solidarity which means international alliances. Who then do we wish to ally with? International socialists are not called upon to support Hamas in Palestine any more than we were called upon to support the Taliban in their struggle as they saw it to liberate Afghanistan. The Left supported the Ethiopians in their struggle against Mussolini's Fascist Italy in 1935-1937, but never supported King Haile Selassie's government. We supported the Vietnamese people in their struggle but criticized Ho Chi Minh's Stalinist government. The tendency to overlook, excuse, or apologize for Hamas is not only a mistake in itself, but it tends toward the campist politics that support uncritically so-called anti-imperialist nations such as China, Russia, and Iran because they are opponents of the United States. Opposition to the United States or to Israel is not enough to win our support. We support movements from below for workers' power, democracy, women's and LGBT rights and against racism and religious bigotry. We support the Palestinians, but not Hamas which believes in none of those things.

Finally, Ben Avraham slanders and defames many leftists and progressives—saying they prefer to mourn for dead Palestinians than to fight with those who are living. These are people who for years (depending on their ages) opposed U.S. imperialist wars from Vietnam to Central America to Iraq

and Afghanistan. They have been powerful voices for Palestinians in their struggle for justice. They march now for a ceasefire. Doesn't ben Avraham want them building the movement?

At a time when we want to build a broad mass movement, why would ben Avraham want to condemn Naomi Klein who [joined with](#) Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib to call for a ceasefire in Washington, D.C.? He calls her "pro-settler," associating her with the Israelis who violently attack and expel Palestinians on the West Bank—but of course for ben Avraham every Israeli is a settler.

Ben Avraham also denounces Joshua Leifer of the organization If Not Now, one of the groups involved in [organizing protests](#) to demand a ceasefire. If we are to build a broad movement for an end to Israel's attack and also to end U.S. support for Israel, we will have to have an alliance both with Palestinian and Arab activists and with just such progressives as ben Avraham criticizes. His approach is absurdly sectarian and self-defeating.

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There is an unfortunate view among some on the Left that we should not publicly criticize Hamas when it is under Israeli assault. But this does not help the people of Palestine. If critics of Israel suppress saying what they believe (that Hamas committed crimes) then they will cause many people who might object to Israel's crimes to reject calls for a ceasefire because the calls seem to come from people who are indifferent to the killing of Jews. Our moral consistency is what encourages people to listen to us. Our willingness to condemn the killing of Israeli children shows people on the fence that our concerns for Palestinian children are motivated by consistent moral principle, not by hatred for Jews.

The Palestinian struggle for justice and self-determination is a just cause. The occupation must be ended, the structures of Israeli apartheid must be dismantled, and the refugees have an internationally recognized right of return. Palestinians, like all oppressed people, have the right to resist, including by armed force, by all legitimate means. Refusing to condemn Hamas does nothing to advance this struggle and may retard it.

**Dan La Botz and Stephen R. Shalom**

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<https://www.tempestmag.org/2023/11/a-response-to-jonah-ben-avrahams-support-palestinians-when-they-fight/>