

# Internal bulletin 132: Apr. '85

## PALESTINE

### 1. Carolan

We have to support the Palestinians, as the oppressed, against Israel as the oppressor. However, what is our alternative to the existing situation of oppression?

The idea of a secular democratic state as a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict is a good one in the abstract, but it is impossible to realise. There are distinct nations which have related to each other with bitter communal-national hostility or unrestrained war for 50 and more years (from the 1936 Syria-Palestine general strike and earlier).

The Jews occupy a distinct territory (the pre-1967 borders of Israel). The secular democratic state as we have understood it involved the smashing and destruction of the Israeli state, an end to the Law of Return (which gives Jews everywhere in the world a right to Israeli citizenship), the return of the Palestinians to all the territory of Israel. This was expected to end and merge the two peoples into a democratic secular state.

Its attraction for us lay in its alleged ability to do justice to everyone concerned. The Jews would cease to be 'Zionists'. The Palestinians could return and either repossess or be compensated. The Jews would have equal rights and rights to what has been created in the last 40 years.

It is plainly nonsense. Nothing short of the complete, inevitably very bloody conquest of the Jews, and driving them out or slaughtering them, would be required to enforce it. At the end of such a process, the last thing you would get would be the intermingling of the two peoples in one secular democratic state.

The idea of the secular democratic state is a mental construction incapable of realisation in our benevolent version of it, and, since the PLO was reorganised in the late 1960s and the old 'drive the Jews into the sea' leader Shukairy gave way to Yassir Arafat, an Arab propaganda cover. A roughly equivalent project would be to amalgamate the German and French nations on the territory occupied by one of them. The difference would be in the intense level of fear, grievance, and mutual animosity that exists between Jews and Arabs compared with French and Germans.

In reality, there are only two alternatives in the situation.

1: Drive out the Jews (that is, accept that that is that 'military conquest')

would mean and aim for, abandoning any commitment to defending the rights of the Palestinian Jews); or

2) Create two states.

'Driving out the Jews' has no place in our programme or world outlook. It is the programme of rampant Arab chauvinism. That leaves the two states solution.

It would serve no purpose for us to try to define precisely where the borders would lie, or what precise relationships would exist between the two states. The point of principle here is that there is no other way to actually give expression to the idea that the Palestinian Jews - most of them now born there - have the right to stay in Palestine, and at the same time to restore the national rights of the Palestinian Arabs. Full restoration is now impossible short of driving the Jews out.

This is a basic outline of my position, so I have not attempted to elaborate in any of the points made or to anticipate objections.

## 2. Kinnell

(This is a bald statement of position, without any attempt at motivation or argument. Those will follow later).

1. To support the Palestinians as the oppressed against Israel as the oppressor.
2. To recognise that two nations, Palestinian-Arabs and Palestinian-Jews, both have rights in Palestine.
3. For the replacement of the present partition (Israel/West Bank/Gaza) by a single state of Palestine west of the Jordan in which both nations have equal rights. This would involve full individual rights; the right of return for the Palestinians; the separation of religion from the state; and some sort of federal system giving local autonomy to mainly-Jewish and mainly-Arab areas.
4. For defence of the neighbouring Arab states against expansionist or imperialistic moves by Israel; but defence of the Jews in the case of a war by the Arab states where the actual issue is a serious drive to those states to overrun Israel.
5. For working class unity; for a socialist federation of the Middle East.

## 3. TILC resolution Aug 1982

(These are clauses 4, 5, 6 of the resolution: the other clauses deal with current events in Lebanon).

1. The Zionist state was established by dispossessing the Palestinian Arabs. Its establishment and continued existence have only been possible with imperialist support - a support given because Israel is the watchdog of imperialism in the Middle East, the servant of its interests, in particular the interests of the dominant imperialist, the United States.

Although this support gives rise on occasion to complications for imperialism in its attempts to relate to the Arab bourgeois and feudal-bourgeois regimes, Israel remains the primary military instrument for maintaining imperialist order and imperialist interests in the Middle East. Imperialism's reliance on Israel is qualitatively different from its reliance on other agencies.

Having expelled the Palestinians and being a weapon against any Arab initiatives opposed to the interests of imperialism, the Zionist state is compelled to try to impose its will over, and sometimes to occupy, ever wider surrounding territories either for its own security or to do the bidding of imperialism.

2. The Palestinian people are the direct and central victims of the imperialist-sponsored Zionist settlement. We are for the destruction of the Zionist state and unconditionally in support of the struggle of the oppressed nation, the Palestinians, against the oppressor, Israel.

We are in favour of the destruction of the Zionist state and the creation in its place of a democratic and secular state in all of Palestine — that is, a unified state respecting the right of all those who presently live there to live side by side with the returning Palestinians as citizens. But while the PLO leadership — because of its own class interests and because of pressure from the Soviet Union — struggles in reality for a bourgeois state and develops consequent strategic and tactical positions, we affirm that the destruction of the Zionist state will necessarily be the task of the oppressed masses under the leadership of the working class and is practically inconceivable without the Arab working class having established its class rule in at least a substantial part of the Arab East.

We advocate and would fight for the maximum cultural and communal rights for Jews within such a state that are compatible with its existence, but oppose any bi-national' or confessional arrangement opposed to the wishes of the Palestinian people.

3. The establishment of a Palestinian sovereign state on the West Bank or East Bank plus Gaza Strip would not constitute a just solution of the Palestinian question. There can be no just settlement without the right of the Palestinian people to return to all of pre-partition Palestine as citizens.

The fact that a section of the PLO leadership has for some time been pressing for such a state and the fact that this leadership would in return for the establishment of such a state guarantee the borders of Israel — if necessary by militarily suppressing those wanting to continue to struggle against the Zionist settlement — does not change the fact that the Palestinian nation has a right to return to all of Palestine, nor does it legitimate the existence of a Jewish state based on the expropriation of Arab lands.

No such agreement resulting from the murderous attack of Zionism or any other forces can be considered as having the slightest legitimacy.

4. I-CL NC May 1980

Slogan: Think about the concrete implications of the secular, democratic state slogan for Palestine. It has no grip on reality. It's an ambivalent slogan, fundamentally wrong because it proposes the forcible integration of two peoples.



The history of Zionist oppression is terrible. But forcible integration means forcible abolition of nationality, which is hardly possible. We're for a socialist united states of the Middle East, but we also need to uphold self-determination.

We don't need to question the sincerity of the Palestinians' declaration of not being hostile to Jews as such. But what is the logic of depriving the Jews of the right to their own state? It's inconceivable it will be acceptable to the Jews. No's going to do the forcible integration. There is no force capable of making it happen. The only even conceivable method is conquest of Israel by the Palestinians and/or Arabs. A socialist revolution is more feasible than the secular democratic state.

The secular, democratic state slogan is not 'algebraic' in a real sense, just ambivalent. It actually means just Palestinian nationalism. But the national rights of the Israelis must be part of our programme. A nation has been created - by terrible means perhaps, but it exists.

Our error: to identify with the oppressed (which is correct) but to go from that to identifying with their nationalist programme (which is wrong).

Our only real answer for the Palestinians consistent with the Israelis' rights must be some sort of partition. (Though I don't know what dividing line).

We've failed to distinguish between the historic reality of Zionism and Zionism as a political entity now. There is not just Zionism as an ideology but also the vicissitudes of the Jewish people.

The USFI approach, which has coloured our attitude, is woolly sentimental bird-worldism.

And what about the Jews in Israel who were born there? We can't visit the sins of their fathers on them. Parallels with South Africa, Northern Ireland, etc. do not hold up. Zionism is not fundamentally about exploiting Arab labour. And, if Northern Ireland were a homogeneous Protestant state, would we advocate military conquest of it?

I don't propose raising self-determination for the Israeli Jews now. But it could be part of our programme. Self-determination for the Palestinian people - does that include the right to determine what happens to the Jews? It seems to, I'm against it.

Israel is a racist state? Yes it is. But aren't all states racist? What's different about Israel is the hostility to and driving out of the Arabs. But the major racist crime is now a fact of history.

Is a different Israeli state possible? Yes, it is possible: e.g. withdrawal to 1967 frontiers etc.

Errison: Carolan's attitude would amount to left Zionism. He approaches it entirely from the Israeli angle, not at all from the Palestinian.

Carolan ignores the evolution of the PLO. Fatah states it "would help Jews anywhere if they faced persecution by racists". It also recommends rights for the Jews and, e.g., Hebrew as an official language in a secular, democratic Palestine.

The PFLP say they don't think Israel is a nation - colonialism cannot be justified just by continuing a bit longer. Israeli workers, even, gain from their settler-state status.

These positions are completely different from the caricatures presented by Carolan. There is even considerable racism within Israel against Oriental Jews. Yes, Jews were terribly oppressed. But that can't justify their oppression of the Palestinian nation. If Israel were even curtailed as Carolan indicates, then there would in any case be massive emigration.

Imperialism wants a Palestinian mini-state. Carolan's attitude is similar. Where are the Palestinian refugees going to go?

m: The Israeli nation is not just some cultural society, but it has a big state apparatus, an expansionist logic, etc. Crimes of 30 years ago? There have been two wars and a lot of other crimes since. The crimes continue.

But Carolan is contradictory. The Jews are supposed to be so backward that they should quit and go to New York rather than live together with the Palestinians. And at the same time the Israelis are presented as innocents, while the Palestinians are presented as likely to cut the Israelis' throats and drive them into the sea. If the Israelis want to emigrate because they can no longer oppress the Palestinians, that is up to them.

f: Is the secular democratic state feasible? Well, is Carolan's proposed reformed Israeli state, e.g. within the 1948 frontiers, feasible? And how would partition help the struggle for socialism? It would increase tensions and conflicts.

The secular, democratic state is not, I think, utopian - it is an algebraic equation for the national conflicts in Palestine. Carolan seems to confuse the rights of the Jews in the area and their right to a state. And much of what he says about changes in the nature of Zionism is a myth. Logically, Carolan's position would lead to arguing the PLO should give up their struggle.

## 5. WF resolution 1974

We give unconditional support to the national liberation struggles of the Arab peoples against imperialism, that is, we support all those struggles regardless of their current leadership.

Israel, created in accordance with the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish state, could be set up in the Arab East only at the expense of the indigenous peoples of the area. Such a state could come into existence and maintain itself only by relying upon imperialism.

Israel is a settler-colonialist and expansionist capitalist state maintained principally by American imperialism, hostile to the surrounding Arab peoples. It is an imperialist beachhead in the Arab world that serves as the spearhead of imperialism's fight against the Arab revolution. We unconditionally support the struggles of the Arab peoples against the state of Israel.

The principal victims of the creation of Israel were the Palestinians - i.e. Arabs who inhabited the region where Israel was established, who have been driven from their homes or placed in subjugation within Israel and the newly occupied territories.

Particularly since 1967, the Palestinians have fought back. We unconditionally support their fight for a democratic secular Palestine.

We oppose any demand for 'self-determination for the Israeli Jewish nation', or 'after a socialist revolution', as a negation of the right to self-determination of the oppressed nationality, the Palestinians.

The demand for a democratic secular Palestine is not contradictory to, but rather part of the perspective of the United Socialist States of the Arab East.

We are totally opposed to anti-semitism, and in favour of full civil rights for

Jews in Palestine as elsewhere. Zionism is no solution for the Jewish people; on the contrary, it sets the Jews in bloody and hopeless opposition to millions of people.

5. We give no political support to the Arab bourgeoisies and their regimes. We indict them among other counts on their failure to fight resolutely against Zionism.

Any 'stages theory', saying 'first settle with Zionism, then the time will come for struggle against the Arab bourgeoisie' is based on illusions. Only the revolutionary socialist mobilisation of the masses against the Arab states as well as against Israel can defeat Zionism conclusively. We criticise the Palestinian liberation movements for this 'stages theory'.

The building of internationalist Marxist parties in the Arab states and in Israel is the urgent task for revolutionaries in the Arab East.

7. In the war of October 1973, or any similar war, we are, however, for the victory of the Arab armies and the defeat of the Zionist state. Irrespective of the reactionary nature of the Arab leaderships and their aims, such a war is objectively part of the justified struggle of the Arab people for self-determination. Victory for Israel in such a war would be a victory for Zionism and a setback for revolutionary forces in the Arab world. Defeat for Israel would be a blow against Zionism and could provide openings for the Palestinians to reclaim their rights.

3. The October war produced in Israel the appearance of political polarisation. However the problems of forming an Israeli cabinet etc. reflect only divisions within the Zionist bloc as to how to maintain their superior position vis a vis the Arabs. In fact the anti-Zionist revolutionary forces in Israel are still tiny to the point of insignificance. It is also true that the war weakened the Israeli economy, but given that this economy has always been supported from outside by US imperialism and world Jewry, this weakening does not represent a significant change in the situation.

However, the Palestinian resistance has not recovered from its position of severe weakness since Black September 1970. Individual terrorism on one hand, and openness to the 'West Bank mini-state' solution on the other, are manifestations of that weakness. In the short term, the revolutionary forces are weaker after the war.

9. The agreements made between Israel and Syria, and between Israel and Egypt, under the auspices of US imperialism, are reactionary agreements. Their purpose is to reach a 'peaceful coexistence' between Israel and the Arab states, and either to crush the Palestinians by brute force or to herd them into a 'mini-state'.

These agreements signify the tentative beginnings of a new US imperialist strategy in the Middle East - that is, to make alliances with the Arab national bourgeoisie.

Neither US imperialism nor Israel nor the Arab bourgeoisie wish to see the Israeli state smashed by a successful Palestinian revolution, rather they desire a cold settlement from above. The most likely variant is the establishment of a Palestinian west bank mini-state (towards which the PLO has an ambiguous position).

Our attitude to this mini-state cannot be categorically stated in advance until it is clear under what conditions it will be established. However we have



a duty to point out the dangers inherent in this development, especially a 'stages' conception of the development of the Palestinian revolution.

The October war and the oil embargo brought to prominence the potential power of the Arabs' stranglehold over oil, which has resulted in the scramble of the advanced capitalist countries for the favours of the Arab rulers. (Hence the heavy investment in Egypt after the war). For the moment these developments will strengthen the hold of the Arab bourgeoisie over the masses (e.g. in Egypt there is now open discussion about selling state enterprises back to private capital, coupled with the purging of Nasserite elements).

(Remaining points exclusively concerned the current situation).

## 6. W.F. editorial 1973

A decisive and crushing defeat for Israel will be good news for revolutionary workers throughout the world, and for enemies of imperialism everywhere.

We say this knowing that the working class rules in neither Israel nor in any Arab country, and that on that level there is nothing to choose between them.

Yet the world's working class, including the Israeli working class though it doesn't yet know it, has an interest in the defeat of Israel and in the victory of the Arabs.

Israel is a pro-imperialist policeman in the Middle East, a bayonet permanently pointed at the throat of the Arabs and their desire to free themselves from imperialist rule.

Israel is also a racist state.

The 'pampered child of imperialism' in the Middle East, the Zionist State of Israel, has by its very existence been the main force militating against the growth of independent working class consciousness in both the Arab and Jewish Middle East peoples. Only the defeat of Israel and the destruction of the Zionist state opens a way through the road block which Israel is for the Arab, and Jewish, masses of the area.

The open support of the British press for Israel has as its centrepiece defence of the "right of Israel to exist". That, for once, takes us to the heart of the question.

We are firmly opposed to the existence of Israel: we say it has no right to exist.

We are opposed to Israel's existence because its existence is inseparable from the oppression of the Palestinians, who have been driven from their homeland because, according to the way the Zionist state is constructed, they are racially unsuitable. Whilst the Palestinians are prepared to participate in a multi-racial state, the Zionist state is racially exclusive and must be destroyed before such a multi-racial state can be built.

The Jewish community has, of course, a right to reach an agreement with the Arabs, and the demand for the defeat of Israel is not at all the demand to expel or drive out her population. The only solution is to create a secular democratic state in which the Palestinians have full right to return to their homeland with compensation and full equality with Palestinian Jews.

But the existing exclusive Zionist state can only exist at the expense of the Arabs, in alliance with and under licence from their imperialist masters: such a state can never be even a normal capitalist state, because it is based on 'religion' and 'race', and deprives the Palestinians of the right to live in their own country, while every Jew in the world... is automatically a citizen of Israel...