



Palestine: two nations, two states

The insurgent Palestinian Arabs in Gaza and the West Bank are now teaching the people of Israel that Karl Marx was right when he wrote that "a nation which enslaves another can never itself be free".

Israel's victory in the Six Day War of June 1967 recreated pre-1948 Palestine, but under Jewish control and with the West Bank and Gaza as 'occupied territories'. The Arabs there have been treated as a conquered people. For over 20 years Israel has held the Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza under a brutal colonial-style regime of the iron fist.

It is no use arguing, as apologists for Israel do, that

there are worse and more brutal regimes in the Middle East than the Israeli administration in the occupied territories. That is no excuse. Jewish colonists, aiming ultimately to displace the Arabs and expand the Jewish-majority area, have been allowed to settle there, and, since the victory of Likud ten years ago, encouraged. Arab leaders have been systematically deported by the government — and some of them assassinated by Israeli chauvinists — in a deliberate policy of beheading the Palestinian Arab nation. Reprisals have been taken against the civilian population. Arab children who dare throw stones at the occupying army risk being shot dead.

For a very long time this policy worked. The Arabs remained mostly quiescent and cowed. Resistance was sporadic and easily controlled. Within Israel and in the West Bank settlements, the poison of Jewish chauvinism and racism spread in the Jewish population. The victory of the Likud coalition in 1977 shifted the Israeli polity to the right. Open racists like Rabbi Meir Kahane, who advocates the expulsion of one and a half million Arabs from the occupied territories, moved in from the outer lunatic fringes of Israeli political life to become a power in the Knesset (parliament). Today opinion polls show that Kahane has the support of five per cent of Israelis.

EDITORIAL

Jewish religious fundamentalism is burgeoning in parallel to the rise of Muslim fundamentalism.

Even before the upsurge in Gaza and the West Bank, Israeli society had been polarising between those willing to follow Begin, Shamir, Sharon or Kehane, and those who held to a different hope for what Israel should be. A quarter of a million people demonstrated in 1982 against the massacre of Palestinian refugees by Lebanese Christians in Sabra and Chatila camps, in areas controlled by the Israeli army. The British equivalent would be six million people on the streets.

Yet those who want to get Israel out of its chauvinist trajectory have been caught in the logic of recent Israeli history. This is symbolised by the Labour Party. Labour now wants to hold peace talks with the Arabs and find a way out of the occupied territories, but it is locked into a coalition with Likud, which wants nothing of the sort. One consequence of the Arab upsurge may be to break the coalition.

The uprising in the occupied territories is the most important political development in the area since the rise of the Palestine Liberation Organisation in the aftermath of the 1967 war. It is the third stage of Palestinian response to their defeat in the Jewish-Arab war of 1948.

For the first 20 years the Palestinian Arabs were stunned and dispersed. They looked to the Arab governments, rather than to themselves, for redress. The Arab defeat in 1967 freed them and led the PLO to a far more active and independent policy. They combined international political campaigning with small-scale military or terrorist action against Israel. They set up bases first in Jordan, then in Lebanon.

They were massacred and driven out of both bases — in Lebanon, partly by Israel. The third stage of the Palestinian Arab response is the stage of mass resistance in the occupied territories themselves.

The signs are that the movement which began in December started locally and spontaneously, and was not part of a thought-out strategy by the PLO or anyone else. It started in response to the intolerable social and political conditions in the territories. The brutality with which the Israelis have responded can only inflame the revolt.

In mid-January Israeli soldiers, throwing tear gas, using guns, and wielding batons, invaded the Al Aqsa and Dome of the Rock mosques — the two most holy Muslim places outside Mecca. This was either a deliberate act calculated to boost Muslim fundamentalism (in the past Israel has done this in the occupied territories), or an act of the most brutally inept stupidity.

The degree of violence necessary to crush the revolt will probably be unacceptable to many in Israel, not to speak of international public opinion. It is the sort of situation Britain faced in Northern Ireland after 1970 — except that the overwhelming majority in the occupied territories are against Israel, and only a minority in Northern Ireland were against Britain. Yet in 18 years it has proved politically impossible for Britain to mobilise the degree of physical violence necessary to crush the IRA. Israel, too, may find it politically impossible to sustain the brutal war against the people of the occupied territories.

This crisis may bring the polarisation within Israel to a head. The options are limited. Already there is a small but important movement among youth in the Israeli army to refuse to serve in the occupied territories. The de facto recognition of Israel by the PLO puts pressure on realistic Israelis to reach a settlement while it is still possible. The coalition is publicly split over demands for a peace conference.

Israel is at a crossroads of its history comparable to that of 40 years ago. Continued occupation of the West Bank can only lead to a choice between two alternatives. Either Israel abandons its commitment to a Jewish national state, annexes the occupied territories, and grants

full citizenship rights to the Arabs there — and it won't — or it becomes committed to indefinite rule by force over a large mass of oppressed Arabs. The second alternative could, if it lasted for decades, lead to a large-scale transformation of Israeli society into one in which the Jewish citizens were heavily dependent on the exploitation of the labour of Arab helots. To compare Israel to South Africa today is an ignorant or malicious libel — Israel still rests fundamentally on a *Jewish* working class — but after such a transformation it would become something not too far from South Africa.

These are the choices which the grassfire of Palestinian Arab revolt in the occupied territories brings the people of Israel up against sharply.

The only policy compatible with the long-term survival of Israel is one of peace with the Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab peoples. That means recognition of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian Arabs, by way of the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories and negotiations with the PLO for the setting-up of an Arab Palestinian state side-by-side with Israel. It means mutual recognition of Israel and the Palestinian Arabs. It means two states for the two Palestinian nations, Jewish and Arab.

It is true that such a settlement does not depend on Israel alone. The Palestinian Arabs are today the oppressed, but the war that has shaped the last 40 years was launched in 1948 by the Arab states — with armies led by British officers — to destroy the new Jewish state. Israel is mainly surrounded by hostile Arab states. The PLO's recognition of Israel's right to exist is by no means clear and unambiguous. If Israel were to just get out of the occupied territories without a general political settlement, then there is no doubt that the territories would be used as military or terrorist bases against Israel.

But it cannot follow that Israel has a right to continue repressing the Palestinian Arabs. The solution is not indefinite Israeli occupation which deprives the Palestinian Arabs of their basic rights of self-control and self-direction. The solution is a peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

Israel should get out of the occupied territories, and agree to the setting-up of an independent Palestinian Arab state there. That is the programme on which Arab and Jewish workers can begin to unite, to fight for a Socialist United States of the Middle East with the right of self-determination for all nationalities in the region.

Nurses

Starting a fight back

The beginning of industrial action by the nurses, in January 1988, could be a turning point in relations between the working class and the Tory government.

It could be a signal to the rest of the labour movement. Dismay at the cuts in the Health Service, support for increased spending on it, and public sympathy with health workers and nurses, are high. In the 1960s, when militant trade unionism had barely begun to develop in the Health Service, solidarity with nurses spurred dockers and other workers to strike. The resistance in the NHS now could be the spark that we have needed so badly since the defeat of the miners' strike.

Everyone knows that the NHS is in a terrible state, and that the Tories are now having to patch it up with

EDITORIAL

periodic injections of cash. The Tories claim that they have spent more on the NHS than any previous government, but they ignore the factors — improved but expensive medical techniques which keep patients alive longer, and a more elderly population — which undermine their figures. Everyone knows from personal experience than the NHS is a mess.

Everyone also knows that nurses and other health workers are badly paid for long, arduous hours. If the Tories want to take on the nurses, they may not be taking on industrial muscle, but they will be taking on a broad range of support.

In 1982 the health workers' pay campaign failed to win its full claim because of timid trade union leadership and the lack of sufficiently determined solidarity action. Since then, miners, printers, and other workers have gone down to defeat due to the total lack of solidarity organised from the top of the trade union movement.

Now the labour movement needs to throw its full weight behind the nurses and the NHS fightback. Other lessons of the past can help. In the 1982 health workers' action, a rank and file grouping, 'Health Workers for the Full Claim', played a significant role in organising militants across the health service. Such groups — only bigger — need to be built now, and not only in health unions. A *rank and file movement* is a vital component that the labour movement currently lacks.

1988 must be the year the Tories dread — when workers unite to defend themselves. We must make the current NHS crisis the beginning of the Tories' end.

Afghanistan

Will the USSR pull out?

In the eight years since they invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, the Russian army and air force have made war on the peoples of Afghanistan — a typical war of colonial conquest, using weapons and tactics that the Americans used in Vietnam and the Nazis in occupied Europe.

They have bombed villages in reprisal for guerilla activity, they have destroyed crops, and they have rounded up groups of hostile people. Over four million Afghans — nearly a quarter of the population — have fled across the border to Pakistan and Iran. Yet the USSR has no secure control of Afghanistan. The recent siege of the town of Khost by anti-USSR forces shows how weak the USSR's grip is on the country.

Now Russian government ministers talk openly about getting out of Afghanistan. But will they? They say that it depends on being able to set up a stable 'neutral' regime there before they leave. One idea which has been floating about for nearly a decade is to bring back the king who was overthrown by a military coup in 1974.

Gorbachev wants to get out and put an end to the haemorrhaging of the USSR's resources. He needs to muster resources for his drive to modernise the USSR's economy. But the USSR cannot afford to be seen to be driven out, to be scuttling.

One reason the USSR went into Afghanistan was to stop a client regime being overthrown. The alternative was to unnerve its other clients, in Africa for example. To get out without appearing to scuttle, the USSR needs a neutralist settlement. It may be difficult to get.

The rural people of Afghanistan normally bear arms. They have never relinquished their independence to any

national government, Afghan or foreign. They have been at war for ten years, at first against the Stalinist-led military regime which took power by way of an army/airforce coup in April 1978, and then against the Russian invaders. Muslim fundamentalism is very strong among them. Iran has influence.

If the Afghans defeat the Russians, and in effect force them out, will they accept a 'neutralist' regime friendly to the USSR? Even if some of them would accept, who would impose it? The old Afghan state machine was already on the point of collapse before the USSR's invasion: what's left of it now?

The Afghan groups are notoriously divided among themselves. What unity is possible in support of a 'neutralist' solution?

Despite all this, the USSR can be driven out. The USSR may even be so desperate to get out that it will opt for a figleaf 'settlement' that will collapse soon after the 'Red' Army goes.

However the story of the Russian invasion of Afghanistan ends, it will have been a very important watershed for the would-be Trotskyist movement. In 1980 many people calling themselves Trotskyists welcomed the Russian presence in Afghanistan! The USSR was 'going to the aid of a revolution', gasped one of the most influential organisations, the Socialist Workers' Party of the USA. Those who didn't welcome the invasion mostly refused to call on the USSR to withdraw.

This phase lasted for a year or so, and then most groups quietly changed their line. The British *Militant* group is a notable exception, still supporting the 'Red' Army in its civilising war against most of the people of Afghanistan. What will they say now if the USSR gives Afghanistan back to the Afghans? Denounce the bureaucracy for betraying the revolution?

One thing none of the groups will do seriously is discuss their own zig-zags on the question. They should!

Get Socialist Organiser delivered to your door by post. Rates (UK) £8.50 for six months, £16.00 for a year.

Name

Address

**Please send me 6/12 months sub. I enclose £.....
To: Socialist Organiser, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.**

Subscribe to Socialist Fight!

12 issues for \$6.

Also available via SF: airmail subscriptions to the British weekly Socialist Organiser. \$50 for one year /48 issues.

Special offer: subscription to both Socialist Organiser and Socialist Fight \$54 for one year (48 SOs, 12 SFs).

Name

Address

.....Code

I enclose \$.....

Send to: SF, PO Box 147, Rozell, NSW 2039.