

How Arab Regimes Crushed the Palestinian Resistance

Ever since 1948 the Arab states have piously proclaimed their support for the right of the Palestinian people to regain their territory from Zionist aggression. At the same time, the Arab regimes have given every indication that they would in fact simply proceed to carve up Palestine among themselves in case of military victory over Israel. They have all refused to integrate the Palestinian refugees in their economies, relegating them to the miserable existence of beggars and recipients of UN relief rations in the huge refugee camps. In order to keep the relatively well-educated and politically conscious Palestinians from causing too much trouble, their "host" governments occasionally arrest the suspected resistance leaders and strafe the camps.

The most brutal and vicious demonstration of the hostility of the Arab states to resurgent Palestinian nationalism was given by the butcher Hussein in the 1970 Jordanian civil war. In a matter of days the U.S.-equipped and British-trained Arab Legion managed to murder several thousand refugees and thoroughly smash the guerrilla resistance groups. In the last two years both the Lebanese and Syrian governments have followed the Jordanian example (with a little "urging" from Israel) by prohibiting any actions against Israel by the guerrillas and integrating them (i.e., subordinating them) into their own military. The lessons of this tragic history must be assimilated if militants of the various ostensibly socialist resistance groups are to find their way to the Marxist program of united proletarian revolution in the Near East.

Lessons of the 1970 Jordanian Civil War

The Jordanian civil war was only the culmination of the struggle that every Arab regime has waged in the Near East to subordinate Palestinian self-determination to its own nationalistic appetites. Only the left wing of the Palestinian resistance movement, the Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DPFLP) led by Nayef Hawatmeh, has been able to draw any of the correct lessons from the Jordanian civil war. While providing a scathing indictment of the Palestinian resistance leadership, its strategy and ideology, the DPFLP is unable to transcend the Menshevik-Stalinist "two-stage revolution" theoretical framework of that leadership.

The DPFLP sharply attacks groups like Fatah for taking an ostensibly agnostic position on ideology and program, thus simply subordinating the resistance movement to bourgeois ideology. It attacks the Fatah slogan that the "primary contradiction is with Zionism, the struggle against Arab reaction is secondary," which completely disarmed the resistance movement before "Arab reaction" which considered the liquidation of the resistance movement primary and the struggle with Zionism secondary. The DPFLP also attacked the slogan of "non-interference in the internal Arab affairs." This, the DPFLP explained, led groups like Fatah "to practice a demagogic and misleading relation with the Palestinian and Arab masses and to give deeds of absolutism to the reactionary regimes in return for their handful of subsidies. It also led these groups to cover up for the programs of the nationalist regimes, regimes which have been un-

able to attain the objectives of national democratic liberation" ("September: Counter-Revolution in Jordan").

In a speech before the General Union of Palestinian Students in Iraq in March 1971, DPFLP head Nayef Hawatmeh attacked the slogan of "non-interference" as leading to the resistance movement's

"turning its back to the developments in the region and to the masses of the East Bank and the Arab region... Thus the East Bank masses frankly felt they had no interest in the struggle. Their unoccupied land suffered from

Palestinian resistance commandos



FREE PALESTINE

reprisal strikes and they had no democratic, social or class interests in the revolution because the revolution did not deal with their problems against the reactionary regime and the ruling forces of imperialism. Nor did it deal with democratic and social issues to solve the problems of the countryside or the urban areas. The resistance turned its back completely to the masses and the masses had to look for some other refuge for fear that this situation might continue or worsen. Unfortunately, they ended up rallying around the lackeys ruling Amman, and for the first time in the history of Jordan, the Hashemite throne came to have a popular base, thanks to our 'Palestinian' policies, those of turning our back to the problems of the East Bank masses and refusing to build a united patriotic front opposing the unpatriotic front represented by the government, Parliament, and all the state apparatus of repression."

—Palestinian Resistance Bulletin, Vol. II, No. 11

In his speech, Hawatmeh points out that the nationalist parochialism of the resistance was carried so far that exclusionist Palestinian trade unions and student organizations were set up in the East Bank: "Given a school with three teachers, two Palestinians and one East Jordanian, the two Palestinians got accepted in the Palestinian Teachers Union while the third stayed out; the same was true of workers and students."

Although not explicitly stated, it is clear from the DPFLP literature that the June 1967 war created such a deep economic crisis (the West Bank ripped off by Israel produced one third of Jordan's gross national product) and so badly discredited the monarchy that a pre-revolutionary crisis existed in Jordan. The inability of the Palestinian resistance movement to present a revolutionary program meant that when the final showdown came between the resistance and the Hashemite army, the Jordanian masses, including the Palestinians who make up the majority of the population, sided with the king against the guerrillas. However, the situation was still so unstable that Hussein was forced to liquidate Jordan's embryonic trade-

union movement, the General Union of Workers in Jordan (GUWJ) which had 20,000 members, in order to consolidate the monarchist September victory.

Even more incisive and damning is the DPFLP's critique of the resistance position toward the Jordanian army and the interlocked agrarian question. The DPFLP pamphlet, "September: Counter-Revolution in Jordan," states: "The September Campaign attested to the cohesiveness of the State institutions as an effective instrument in the hands of imperialism and monarchic reaction." The pamphlet goes on to recall how each resistance group, including the DPFLP, expected the army to split, with a section coming over to the resistance. The pamphlet proceeds to a class analysis of the composition of the Jordanian army and, noting the rural origins of the ranks, concludes that the road to winning over a viable section of the monarchist army is through "a democratic program for the rural areas." However,

"the conspicuously sectional policy of the Resistance and the exploitation of this tendency on the part of the regime, pushed the village into the lap of its national and class enemy (reaction and imperialism) and made it fight on their side...."

Hawatmeh's March 1971 speech also contains a rather accurate description of the petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes

"which call themselves socialist in spite of the fact that they have emptied socialism of all its democratic, political and organizational content, as well as all that this implies in terms of economic, military and agricultural programs. They make the masses see in socialism an ugly face that does not belong to it. They make them see it as oppression and repression, a Bonapartist rule (of a small group from a specific class, i.e. the petty bourgeoisie, which claim to represent all the classes in society)....

"... by taking radical, economic, military, political and cultural stances, the petty-bourgeoisie would have had to tighten its belt. But it was not ready to tighten it because of its class interest... Actually, its ambition and admiration of bourgeois life was endless."

Hawatmeh extends his analysis of the petty-bourgeois nationalist regimes to the equally petty-bourgeois nationalist leaderships of the resistance movement, but only in a partial manner. For it can be said equally of men like Arafat, leader of Fatah, and even those like Habash, leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who mouth "Marxist-Leninist" rhetoric that their "ambition and admiration of bourgeois life is endless."

Bonapartists Out of Power

Yasir Arafat's career was typical of most of the leadership of the Palestinian resistance movement. From upper-class Palestinian parentage, Arafat along with the other children of formerly rich Palestinian families disenfranchised by the 1948 war went on to study engineering at Fuad I (now Cairo) University. There Arafat organized the Union of Palestinian Students in Egypt, through which many of the future leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement passed. During their student days, Arafat and many of his future colleagues fell under the influence of the extremist Moslem Brothers. After graduating with their engineering degrees they joined the

ranks of educated Palestinians who were flocking to join the burgeoning technocracies of the oil-rich Persian Gulf countries. Arafat went to Kuwait, where his brother got him the job of road engineer in the government's Department of Public Works. After two years of working for the government, Arafat opened a private contractor's office and amassed a modest fortune.

Kahlil el-Wazir, mentioned in the *New York Times* (12 October 1972) as a possible leader of the Black September group, was at Alexandria University at the same time Arafat was at Fuad I. They both worked together in the Union of Palestinian Students and the Moslem Brothers, and both met again in Kuwait. Most of the future leaders of the Palestinian resistance movement ended up in Kuwait, a motley crew of wealthy contractors and merchants, with comfortable lives but embittered at being politically dispossessed of their "rightful" place as the ruling class of a Palestinian state, an ambition of which their nationalism is the ideological expression.

Paralleling the career of Arafat, although several years his senior, PFLP leader George Habash was born at Lydda—site of the PFLP's 9 May 1972 hijacking and airport massacre two weeks later. After studying medicine at the American University in Beirut, Dr. Habash graduated the same year Arafat entered Fuad I University, in 1951. Like Arafat, Habash laid the foundations for his organization—which

was called the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM)—among university students. The ANM was more Nasserite than Nasser, more Pan-Arab than the Ba'athists and always more adventurist than any of the commando groups. When Arafat was still an unknown student activist, Habash was the head of a large underground movement spread throughout the Arab world, which was putting into practice its modification of the Ba'athist slogan ("Unity, Liberation, Socialism") into the slogan of his group: "Unity, Liberation, Revenge." When Fatah began its terrorist operations in 1965, Habash, financially backed by Nasser, set up a competing sabotage organization: the Heroes of the Return. The very name recalls Trotsky's condemnation:

"Individual terrorism in our eyes is inadmissible precisely for the reason that it lowers the masses in their own consciousness, reconciles them to impotence, and directs their glances and hopes towards the great avenger and emancipator who will some day come and accomplish his mission."

Another organization emerging prior to the June War was the Palestinian Liberation Front, led by Ahmed Jibril, a graduate of Sandhurst (the British military academy) and a former officer in the Syrian Army. Following the June war the PLF fused with the Heroes of the Return and another Habash organization, the Youth of Revenge, to form the PFLP. However, Jibril was still closer to the Syrian Ba'ath than to Habash, and when the latter was arrested by the Syrian government at the beginning of 1968, Jibril split. During Habash's imprisonment, Hawatmeh, (who had been an ANM activist since his youth) organized a left faction within the PFLP which captured the leadership of that group at its August 1968 convention. Habash launched a campaign against Hawatmeh culminating in shoot-outs in the Amman suburbs. Hawatmeh was forced to split and set up the DPFLP.

Petty-Bourgeois Frenzy and Mass Terror

Both Fatah and the PFLP drew their own conclusions from the September war—"relying on the Arab regimes rather than the Arab masses," to paraphrase the DPFLP critique. Following the Hashemite slaughter of hundreds of commandos and 5,000 civilians, Arafat flew off to embrace both Nasser and Hussein and sign the "Cairo Agreement," which essentially marked the end of Fatah's commando operations. Instead of an "armed struggle" which Arafat realizes he can never win, he

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looks to the diplomatic agility of his Moslem brothers in Cairo and Amman to solve the Palestinian problem.

The PFLP, on the other hand, started up its campaign of terrorist spectacles: hijacking airplanes and holding the passengers as ransom for PFLP prisoners, publicity and of course cash, to supplement its share of Saudi Arabian, Kuwaiti and Lybian oil royalties. But the Lydda airport massacre, where three Japanese sympathizers of the PFLP indiscriminately machine-gunned airline passengers, killing 26 and wounding 72, demonstrated that PFLP terrorism has another objective: rekindling the Arab-Israeli war. In such a confrontation, the PFLP believes, either Israel will be destroyed or the Arab regimes will be discredited and the authority of the resistance groups enhanced, as was the case following the June 1967 defeat.

All the resistance groups, including the DPFLP, write off the Israeli working class as a force for revolutionary change in this period. But groups like the PFLP and "Black September" actually desire to shore up Zionist chauvinism and drive the Israeli working class straight into the arms of right-wing Zionists like Menachem Begin and his Herut Party. Begin and Habash represent the most extreme expressions of their respective nationalisms, most eager to embrace the genocidal conclusions which follow from nationalist ideology. The extreme Arab nationalist believes that all Israelis must be Zionists, just as ultra-Zionists believed that all non-Jewish Germans had to be Nazis. By whipping up Zionist chauvinism within the Israeli working class and reinforcing popular support within Israel for the expansionist and revanchist policies of the Zionist government, PFLP adventurism renders a valuable service to the Israeli rulers.

The DPFLP

The DPFLP properly condemns those "forces whose programs and practices are influenced by petty-bourgeois adventurism," even though they espoused Marxist, socialist and progressive slogans. But the DPFLP can offer no alternative to Fatah's capitulation to the butchers of the resistance movement or to PFLP and "Black September" adventurism. The DPFLP claims to recognize the limitations of the resistance movement "with a subjective structure that contained all the class and ideological contradictions present among our people." But its own call for a "patriotic" or "national united front" can only be a call for a similar class-collaborationist formation which is either subordinated to the "patriotic" bourgeoisie (who, as Hawatmeh himself pointed out in the same speech in Iraq, are themselves tied to imperialism like "brokers") or else destined to tear itself apart in its first confrontation with the reality of the class struggle.

Unlike the PFLP and Fatah, the DPFLP knows better than to rely on the Arab regimes to fight its battles. But it is unable to recognize the Israeli working class as a potential ally in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination through socialist revolution, as the "Trojan horse" within the Israeli state. The DPFLP is incapable of seeing that if the Zionist state is to be smashed—not in a reactionary and genocidal fashion by some revanchist Bonapartist Arab regime, but as a step toward the socialist federation of the Near East—then the burden necessarily falls to the working people of Israel under the leadership of the Arab-Hebrew vanguard party. The DPFLP's failure to recognize

this elementary necessity is as debilitating as the "sectionalism" of Fatah which could not see the need for Palestinian-Jordanian class unity.

The guerrilla groups, from Begin's Zionist Irgun (which carried out the infamous Deir Yassin massacre of Arab villagers in the 1948 war) to the Palestinian nationalist "Black September" (responsible for last year's indefensible terrorist kidnapping of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics), represent bonapartism out of power. Other groups like the Syrian Sa'ika or Iraq's "Arab Liberation Front" are simply the armed extension of the Ba'athist regimes—i.e., bonapartism in power. No matter how spartan the guerrilla experience, no matter how self-sacrificing the individual cadres, the guerrillas in power would constitute a conservative privileged elite whose "ambition of and admiration for bourgeois life is endless."

Guerrillaism and Socialist Revolution

Guerrillaism is no strategy for socialist revolution, as the Guevarists and Maoists would have us believe. The experience of the colonial revolutions



Yasir Arafat, head of Fatah. After the 1970 massacre of Palestinian resistance fighters by Jordan's King Hussein, Arafat signed Cairo Agreement shutting down Fatah guerrilla operations, preferring instead to hold onto his subsidies from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other reactionary Arab regimes.

attests to the fact that while the guerrillas in power may, in exceptional circumstances, be forced to expropriate the bourgeoisie and replace capitalist with working-class property relations (although with considerable reluctance both in China and Cuba), the economic expropriation of the capitalist class takes place within the context of the political expropriation of the working class. The trade unions are stripped of their independence and subordinated to the bonapartist bureaucracy and, likewise, the workers parties are either merged with the state (as was the case with the Cuban Stalinists) or suppressed (the Cuban, Chinese and Vietnamese Trotskyists). Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution—confirmed positively by the Russian Revolution and negatively since in scores of cases from China to Bolivia—demonstrates that the democratic tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution can be consummated only when the revolutionary proletariat, supported by the peasantry, seizes state power for its own, socialist, aims. The just and democratic solution of the Palestinian question, a bi-national Hebrew and Arab state, entails the victory of the proletarian revolution in the Near East led by a multi-national vanguard party.

Most of the ostensibly Trotskyist organizations today have in fact abandoned the proletarian internationalist program of the Fourth International. Instead they chase after various petty-bourgeois nationalists in the name of a mythical "Arab Revolution." They all have their favorites, of course. Thus

the U.S. Socialist Workers Party praises the Fatah to the skies, Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League in England for many years chased after the PFLP and the French Ligue Communiste showered its favors on the DPFLP.

The DPFLP, however, has seen through this vicarious Arab nationalism and, in a crude way, captured the essence of the Pabloist liquidationism of these fake Trotskyists: abandoning the struggle for the Fourth International and its program of working-class independence and instead acting as cheerleaders and left pressure groups for various petty-bourgeois forces. Responding to the Ligue's enthusiastic hosannahs, the DPFLP wrote: "These movements find no justification for their existence, but to quickly adopt the developing revolutionary movements in different regions of the world, and project them as if they were new Trotskyist currents" (*Palestine Resistance Bulletin*, June 1971). Instead of challenging the nationalism, guerrillaism and Maoist two-stage revolution theories of the DPFLP and other Palestinian left-nationalists, the Pabloists simply aid their present confusion by uncritically tailing after them.

For a Bi-National Palestinian Workers State!

The democratic solution to the Palestinian question begins with the recognition that there exist two nations with equal rights to the same land: both the Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrew-speaking population of present-day Israel have nowhere else to go. Most of the resistance movement, including the DPFLP and Fatah, recognizes that there are two nations which must share the same land; what they deny is that both nations have equal rights. Socialists must steadfastly put forward the need for a bi-national workers state in Palestine as a part of a socialist federation of the Near East. But this cannot be achieved by forcing a single state on peoples divided by decades of communal strife and national conflict. It must be freely chosen. To guarantee this, proletarian internationalists must recognize the right of self-determination both for Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrew-speaking population, their right to form separate states.

Of course we should argue that the decision to form such a separate state would be foolish, impracticable, even reactionary. Of course we demand that any such state must be democratic, not semi-theocratic as is present-day Israel. Of course such a state would occupy far less territory than Israel currently does. But nonetheless, to deny the Hebrew nation the right to say no to a merger of peoples is not a democratic solution. To shove a bi-national solution down the throats of the Jewish workers in Israel is to push them into the arms of the Dayans, the Meirs and even the Begins.

But when equal rights are conceded, the burden of proof of goodwill rests with the Israeli worker, for it is the Israelis who have acquiesced to the oppression of the Palestinian Arabs by the Israeli bourgeoisie. The Palestinian Arabs, driven off their land and into refugee camps to receive their seven cents a day in UN rations or to be used as coolie labor in Israeli industries, are the oppressed nation. Unlike the guilt-ridden U.S. New Left, we are not moralists who would punish the Israeli worker for the sins of history by depriving him of his national rights. But all the same the Israeli worker must demonstrate to his oppressed class brothers that he will fight his government politically—that he will fight his colonialism, its racism, its clericalism, its expansionism. Such a fight requires the construction of a multi-national vanguard party, which can be built only through the struggle to assimilate the theory of the permanent revolution, and on that theoretical and programmatic basis to regroup the best militants from organizations like the DPFLP. ■