

## Concluding A REPLY TO CLOVIS MAKSOUD

# The MISTAKES of The ARAB SOCIALISTS

By HAL DRAPER

As we see it, then, Comrade Maksoud is reluctant to take a square look at one whole side of the post-war impasse in Palestine. He can see clearly the reactionary contribution which Zionism made to this impasse. But he does not give weight to the force which we emphasized in the first part of this reply: the flight of the Jewish people from Europe, and the channelization of this struggle for sheer survival to Palestine.

*An exhausted victim of shipwreck is swimming in burning waters. He tries to climb into a lifeboat. The lifeboat already has its quota. To take on another will not swamp it but it will make the fate of all in it so much the more precarious. "Why pick on our little boat?" say the possessors of the lifeboat indignantly, as they crack the newcomer over the head with an oar and throw him back into the water. . . .*

Maybe that picture is not entirely fair, but it will serve to underline a point. The point is that the post-war plight of a desperate mass of Jews brought about a situation around Palestine which could not be met simply with denunciation of Zionism and in which the rights of the Arab peoples were not the only considerations for internationalist socialists.

We have already sketched the revolutionary solution which we proposed, revolutionary in the literal sense that it depended on revolutionary action from below among the Arab and Jewish masses. It was only in the context of such an approach that we had a right to advocate the free immigration of Jews not only to the U. S. and any other "country of their choice" but also to Palestine.

## Immigration and Rights

Here Comrade Maksoud does us a grave injustice. He quotes our statement that the Jews (like all other peoples, remember) have a "right" to immigrate ("to found a new life") in "the country of their choice." He then proceeds to transpose this to mean that according to us there is a "Jewish right to Palestine," and this naturally is exactly the Zionist claim. Therefore, the ISL holds "the concept of a 'Jewish right to Palestine'" and really accepts Zionism. . . .

The right of desperate Jews to find haven in Palestine or anywhere else is not their right to take that country away from its inhabitants. Contrariwise, if Maksoud rightly insists that there is no "Jewish right to Palestine," that does not mean that he must oppose Jewish immigration.

We know well enough why the Arabs link the two questions. It is no mystery. It is because Zionism linked them. The Zionists looked on unrestricted immigration as the means of gaining a formal Jewish majority in the country and thus getting into position to take it away from the Arabs.

The Arab opposition to immigration, and the Zionist calculations on immigration, were the two sides of the same coin. Both sides read: *Interne war and hatred between the peoples—No Exit.*

The internationalist socialist attitude on free immigration had to be linked with the revolutionary solution of a bi-national Palestine.

The Arab solution was much simpler: *Let the Jews get out and stay out, and go inflict their plight on some other people*, who no doubt would feel the same way about it. The Zionist solution was also simple: *Take their country away from the Arabs.* The Zionist position was not, and never has been, founded on the specific post-war problem of uprooted Jewish masses. They merely demagogically utilized this appeal in order to further their own objective of taking Palestine away from its people. Thus, neither from the Arab side nor from the side of the Zionist leaders of the Jews could a solution be found.

Partition was the UN's attempted compromise between conflicting aims which could lead only to bitter-end war. Sections of Palestine were already inhabited mainly by Jews. Let these Jews have their own territories under their own state, separate from Arab Palestine, and maybe there will be peace.

The calculation was mistaken, and partition could not bring any real peace or any real solution. As already discussed, we were against partition as a "solution." But being against partition still didn't answer a different question:

Did the Palestinian Jews have a right to self-determination in their territories? We believed that the Palestinian Jews did have a right to decide that they wanted partition, even though in our opinion this was a wrong and bad choice.

## Self-Determination—for Whom?

Let us try to clear up the following questions about this "right to self-determination."

(1) Simple though it is, it is often important to drive home an easy distinction: there is a big difference between the RIGHT to self-determination and the wisdom of EXERCISING that right in any given case.

Sometimes people who have no difficulty in agreeing with this in the abstract have great difficulty in grasping it in a specific case where they are vigorously against the exercise of the right.

Take an American case in point: For a long time the Stalinists raised the demand in the U. S. for "self-determination for the American Negroes" in a certain "black belt" which they drew in maps through the

Southern states. The CP made clear that it advocated this breakaway from the union.

Our movement has always ridiculed this demand. Only a handful of Stalinist Negroes have ever been for it. It never struck any response among the Negro people. We could explain why. We opposed the idea.

But that did not stop us from taking up a different question. We said clearly that if the Negro people ever came to favor this move, even against our advice to them, then we recognized their right to self-determination, even though we viewed it as a mistake.

(Is it theoretically possible that the American Negroes might come to such a pass? If the Negroes ever faced in the U. S. the gas-chamber horrors and concentration camps which the Jews passed through in Europe, who can deny the possibility?)

But all we want to do at this point is illustrate the idea of how we recognized the right to a self-determination against which we advised.

(2) "Which Jews have this right? Is it every Jew?" asks Maksoud, and he writes that our resolution did not answer this. This is strange, since our resolution has a specific passage on this very question.

Our resolution said that with regard to this problem of the right to self-determination—

"(a) the problem concerns not Jews or people of Jewish descent in the world as a whole, but specifically the Jewish community in given territorial areas of Palestine, and (b) whatever the scientific-theoretical verdict might be for the Jews as a whole, it is obvious that the Palestinian Jewish community has acted and is acting exactly as if it were a national people, and this is enough for the purpose of determining a political program."

Isn't that perfectly clear? We (not the Zionists) are talking about a certain peculiar people in a certain territory, the Palestinian Jewish community.

## Jewish Nationalism

(3) Maksoud asks further: Do the Jews constitute a "national self"? Are they a "national entity"? Also "what Jews belong to this national self?"

Now we are more or less acquainted with many decades of socialist and non-socialist argumentation over the question "Are the Jews a nation (or a race, etc.)?" What our resolution limits itself to pointing out is that this time-honored conundrum does not have to be settled in order to grapple with the question we raised.

For the question always referred to "the Jews" as a whole over the world. Maksoud still does so in his article. I am not at all sure what can be said about "the Jews" of the world collectively; I am not even sure that anything at all can be said that applies to this heterogeneous collectivity called "the Jews." The Zionist line of talk along these lines, in my opinion, boils down to a mystical tribalism, and is of no theoretical value whatsoever.

We were interested in the much more concrete question of the specific Jewish community situated on a certain territory in Palestine, and its right of self-determination not as "Jews" in general but as a certain community in the land.

This community, we pointed out, whatever its origins, had in fact developed to the point where it was demonstrably ACTING as a national people.

A question of Marxist method is in order here. One can dispute everlastingly whether a certain people constitute a "nation." One can usefully go over various criteria for nationhood, among the varying criteria which have been weighed by Marxists among others. Such theoretical discussion can be very good. But for Marxists above all others, the test of theory comes in life. If "theory" has told us that X is not a nation, but if this people acts historically and collectively in every way that a national people acts, then something is wrong with the theory, or else some important change has taken place which theory has not yet caught up with.

In the case of the Jews, I believe it was especially the latter that was true. On the other hand, a certain Jewish community (however transplanted) had in fact taken root in Palestine and developed a national physiognomy, one which was even different from that of the immigrant Jews. And on the other hand, tens and tens of thousands of European Jews were forcibly turned mentally into the channel of Jewish-national feeling by the simple fact that they were uprooted from every other national soil. Hitler had his victory.

Jewish-national feeling swarmed into the vacuum created in the minds of concentration-campful of Jews. Hitlerism created Jewish nationalism in a way that Zionism by itself could never do.

## Invaders and Refugees

In any case, all that our resolution points out (and it limits itself wisely) is that we as Marxists do not impose our schema about "who constitutes a nation" upon facts. It is sheer doctrinairism to counterpose some theory about nationhood, against the fact that the Palestinian Jewish community has acted exactly as if it were a national people.

This is not to derogate theory. I could discuss with Maksoud the theoretical criteria for Israeli nationhood. But I should like to point out that the development of Israeli nationalism (today an indisputable fact, reac-

tionary as it often tends to be) is an historical event which a Marxist has reason to keep in mind in renovating his theory.

(4) Lastly, granted that this specific Jewish community in Palestine may be regarded like other ethnic communities situated in given territories and given the same rights, isn't their case different after all because of the way they got there? That is, since this Palestinian community was established and nourished by Zionism muscling in on Arab territory, aren't they still mere interlopers and invaders?

This is on pretty thin ice, when you start applying it to a whole people, settled in a land, and not merely a military garrison. What might we find out if we dug into the mode of arrival of various minority peoples in many countries?

The whites in South Africa, for example, are invaders and interlopers (in origin); but this undoubted fact hardly points to a solution of the racial problem there. We would not be in favor of throwing the racist whites back into the sea. We are in favor of ending the dictatorship of the white minority over the black and colored majority, and building a thoroughly democratic state where both races could live in harmony. (In South Africa too this objective can be won only through a revolutionary solution.) But if put up against it, we would have to recognize the right of the minority whites to "self-determination" in a sadly partitioned South Africa. . . .

In Palestine the invasion and affront is more recent. The wound is rawer. That is true. It is also one reason for the hellishly difficult dilemma of the region. But we can see no other socialist stand possible.

In summary for this section: this right to self-determination was a right (the exercise of which we disagreed with) of a Palestinian community territorially established and acting as a nation.

Israel has as much "right" to existence as Pakistan. The problem that we see is not whether Israel has a "right" to exist, but how all of the people of the region can live together.

## Toward Socialist Federation

Israel may have a "right" to exist, but its existence will be a hell for the Jews and a thorn in the flesh of the Arabs as long as it insists on being a Jewish ghetto in an Arab world.

Before Israel can find a modus vivendi with its neighbors, it must overcome its Zionist illusions and policies. The Jewish people of Israel must come to the realization that the country must be built as a bi-national state, with cultural autonomy and full equal political and social rights for both peoples. Zionist expansionism must be repudiated. Its anti-Arab measures must be reversed.

All of this requires an internal revolutionary rejection of Zionism's specific politics, whether it consciously takes the form of a repudiation of Zionism or (perhaps more likely) takes the form of a gradual abandonment of all of Zionism's conclusions.

A movement toward this objective, we believe, can be built in Israel, even if only small elements of it are present now. But what will never be built in Israel is any movement or even grouplet which will advocate giving up the country's independence. The "emasculatation" of Israel's independence and sovereignty can be accomplished only by war, and then only perpetuated by armed force and terror.

A bi-national Israel is only a first step. We look to a larger aim: an independent federation of the Near East states which constitute an economic and geographical entity. We cannot venture to say whether such a federation can or will include all the Arab states, in line with the aims of Arab nationalism. We are very interested in what our Arab comrades write about this question. But we see the final solution to the Palestine question in federation.

We have written time and again that the genuine socialists in Israel—and we do not mean the hard-bitten Zionist chauvinists, some of whom call themselves socialists, who are betraying socialist principles—can make their great contribution to this end by fighting with such a program for an understanding with the Arab people and for Arab rights, in the first place for the rights of the Arabs in Israel itself. The relative monolithism of Israeli Zionist chauvinism hardens Arab chauvinism.

## A Plea to Arab Socialists

But now we are addressing ourselves to Arab socialists. We tell them the same thing:

Only insofar as you show fight against the reactionary and chauvinist aims of the Arab governments, can you expect to awake and enflame courage and heart among Jewish socialists who want to break out of the Zionist trap! The responsibility is yours too. It belongs to the genuine socialists on both sides of the line.

You say that the destruction of Israel is necessary to bring peace. Can you really believe that? Do you believe that even if the Israeli armies are crushed in a war by the Arab power, the Jewish population will settle down as Arab citizens? No, as always, the worst will be brought out on both sides, in a permanent state of revolt and war and terrorism. What exactly will be solved, since you insist so strongly on having a "solution" and not only a "settlement"?

Comrade Maksoud wrote on June 7: "The presence of Israel as a state constitutes such a threat to the Arabs that all their attention is diverted away from foreign policy. The true interest of the Arabs in international affairs lies in pursuing a vigorous and positive neutralism, but the local area tensions prevent the effective expression of this interest and block the materialization of a unified Third Force movement in Asia. This movement is the only possible path toward peace. By obstructing it, Israel acts as an agent of war and imperialism."

We beg to submit that this is not socialist think-

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# Arab Socialists — —

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ing, though we can readily believe that it has its appeal to the people. Does it mean, for example, that the existence of Israel leads the Arab regimes to truckle to the West in the hope of winning support against Israel? that this keeps the Arabs from joining some "Third Force movement"? that if Israel were only removed, the Arabs would become Third-Force and peace on earth would be attained?

That is self-delusion at best. In every other country, people have their own reasons for choosing between the war camps and lining up, hoping to gain some advantage, some "lesser evil," some profit. If Israel were to disappear, the Arab rulers would be no more for a real Third Camp than they are now. They would still have much to hope to gain from one side or the other; and in any case, the alternative is not some kind of illusory "neutrality" (even à la Nehru) but a positive dedication to international socialism. A strong Arab socialist movement can do this. But Comrade Maksoud continually keeps identifying the policy of the Arab socialists with that of the Arab regimes as a whole.

## A BI-NATIONAL PROGRAM

We would like to ask Comrade Maksoud and his colleagues: Granted that other Arabs, who are not socialists, are seduced by imperialism because of their hatred of Israel; but you socialists, you the vanguard, is it possible for you to fight for a line which is against every outside imperialism and at the same time extend the hand of friendship to anti-Zionist Israelis on a common program (not war)?

Why do YOU not swim against the stream and propose an anti-imperialist program for the Arab people, which will stimulate tendencies away from Zionist expansionism within Israel, which will

promote revolutionization within Israel—and which will not tell the Israelis that their country has to be crushed in war?

Comrade Maksoud mentions that in the war against Israel it was the reactionary, anti-democratic, sometimes anti-Semitic, non-progressive elements who became vocal, while the "rational democratic forces . . . were maneuvered . . . to abstention." We did not quite grasp the explanation he gave for this. But it is a development that has been seen before. It often means that the socialists found themselves, in practice, traveling in the train of reaction, because of their lack of an independent revolutionary policy.

**Comrade Maksoud's argument seems to say that the existence of Israel is counter-revolutionary in and of itself because the Arab's hatred of it diverts them from settling with their own rulers, diverts their revolutionary energies. But this is exactly the kind of situation in which socialists must act like a vanguard, not as echoes of mass prejudices and fears.**

Here in the U. S. hatred and fears of Russia overlay and stifle class-consciousness and socialist aspirations. If the threat of Stalinism could be removed, an enormous weight would be lifted that now weighs down on the socialist movement. In this situation, there are not a few renegades who have concluded that it is wise for socialists to support the drive to World War III in order to settle with Russia. . . .

Arab war against Israel would no more solve the Palestine problem than World War III can solve the world crisis. It is the special task of the socialist vanguard not to go along with majority fears and prejudices but to boldly propose their revolutionary solutions and fight for them against the field. A movement which is seduced by imperialism because of Israel will be seduced in some other way if Israel is removed, for it has lost its socialist moorings.

We propose that the Arab socialists consider the program of a bi-national Palestine in a Near East federation, as the revolutionary alternative to endless war, and to this end organize genuine socialist forces on both sides of the Israeli-Arab border.

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