

For a Socialist Federation of the Middle East!

Israel Out of the Occupied Territories!

For the past year the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza has been locked in a heroic and unequal struggle against Israeli occupation. Forty years after 700,000 Palestinians were driven from their homeland by Zionist terrorism, the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) has focused world attention on the denial of their rights as a people. A new generation of youth, frustrated by the failure of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and big-power diplomacy to end the brutal occupation of their land, is rising to reassert its people's long-denied national rights. In the wake of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacres, and countless terror bombings of Palestinian and other Arab populations, the *intifada* has stripped away the myth of Israel as a land of idealistic kibbutzniks making deserts bloom, revealing the brutal reality of the Zionist "Iron Fist."

Early on in the revolt, when the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) had trouble dispersing crowds of angry, stone-throwing youths with tear gas, soldiers began breaking demonstrators' hands. When nightly television newsclips of this cold-blooded brutality horrified public opinion around the world, the Zionists

emulated their South African allies and "solved" their public relations problem by banning the cameras.

The Israeli regime has tried everything short of a massive genocidal bloodletting to quell the revolt, and yet it shows no signs of abating. The beatings, jailings, mutilations, deportations, and demolitions have failed to break the resistance. Nor have the measures of "collective punishment;" the curfews and restrictions on food, fuel and electricity which are periodically imposed on Palestinian communities. Israeli military tribunals arbitrarily jail anyone suspected of participating in or abetting the *intifada*. The homes of suspects are routinely demolished, while the army "keeps the peace" by spraying crowds of rock-throwing schoolchildren with automatic weapons fire. To date hundreds of Palestinians have been murdered and thousands more have been wounded. Israeli soldiers have recently been issued with plastic bullets to fire at the demonstrators. Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin explained: "Our purpose is to increase the number (of people wounded) among those who

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take part in violent incidents....Whoever takes part must know that I am not worried by the increased number of casualties" (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, 28 September). The Israeli authorities have also detained some 10,000 Palestinians, of whom 2,000 languish in internment camps under "administrative detention" without charges or even the pretense of a trial. Dozens more have been arbitrarily and cruelly ripped away from their homes and families and deported to Lebanon.

The pro-Israel lobby in the U.S. likes to portray the racist Zionist state as an island of democracy in a sea of Arab despotism. But one of the first casualties of the Israeli attempts to crush the *intifada* has been the pretense of "democracy" in the Zionist fortress. Dozens of Arab journalists and even a handful of leftist Jewish writers have been imprisoned, and several newspapers have been closed down because they dared to print the ugly truth about the measures used against the protestors.

Hussein Suspends the "Jordanian Option"

The United States—patron and protector of the Zionist state since its creation—has been unable to do much more than wring its hands. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's hard-line policy has created anxiety in the U.S. State Department over the long-term effect of Israel's deteriorating public image in America. Therefore, Washington has objected in an unusually blunt fashion to the arrogant Zionist policy of deporting suspected Palestinian leaders to Lebanon, and has even voted for the occasional motion of condemnation in the United Nations Security Council. But the U.S. rulers know that Israel remains its most powerful anti-Soviet ally in the Middle East and an indispensable counterrevolutionary watchdog for the entire region.

Shamir, also cognizant of this fact, has felt free to ignore all U.S. complaints and give Reagan's Secretary of State, George Shultz, the cold shoulder during the latter's various "peace missions," to the Middle East. Shultz only undertook his diplomatic shuttles because he feared that Israel's naked repression of the Palestinians posed serious strategic problems for the maintenance of the Zionist garrison state. Bowing to the Israeli refusal to negotiate with the PLO, Shultz dutifully scoured the Middle East for Palestinian quislings willing to submit to Israel's diktat. He proposed to "settle" the Palestinian question by promising eventual Jordanian rule over some of the West Bank and Gaza—a position akin to that advocated by the Israeli "Labor" Party since the 1967 war. But Shultz found no takers among the Palestinians. The proposal was also rejected out of hand by Shamir, whose intransigence was rewarded with a new shipment of American warplanes.

The "Jordanian option" was foreclosed, at least for the time being, when King Hussein, Washington's "Royal Highness" of Jordan, announced on 31 July that he was giving up all "legal and administrative ties" to the West Bank. Hussein called for the formation of a PLO government-in-exile for the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. The Hashemite monarch reiterated that "Jordan is not Palestine" and returned full-circle to the proposition that the PLO is "the sole legitimate repre-

sentative of the Palestinian people," thus repudiating his U.S.-anointed role as diplomatic proxy for the Palestinians in an imperialist-brokered "peace process." Ominously, Hussein's move coincided with heightened Israeli repression in the Occupied Territories, including a campaign by Israel's intelligence service, Shin Bet, to round up, torture and deport suspected members of the popular committees directing the *intifada*.

A *New York Times* editorial of 2 August sermonized that, "Either the P.L.O. will be able to bear the new burden he [Hussein] imposes by changing character, defining attainable goals and taking responsibility for governance of ordinary life. Or it will fail, prompting West Bank residents to clamor for the King to return." Of course, Israel is not asked to change *its* character.

Yasir Arafat

Zionist terrorist Shamir, a former leader of the Stern Gang, which carried out the massacre of 250 unarmed civilians at Deir Yassin in 1948, responded to Hussein's move with the announcement that: "Israel will prevent in the most determined way any attempt to carry out any idea—to the extent that there are madmen who raise it—of establishing a Palestinian government. Such people will be met with an iron fist that will leave no trace of their attempts." In line with this policy, Israeli officials decreed that the PLO will not be allowed to fund schools and health services that have lost Jordanian support.

Hussein's maneuver underscores the danger of Palestinian reliance on Arab diplomacy. Quite possibly Hussein expects that the PLO will be discredited by its inability to improve the lot of the Palestinians on the West Bank. In that case after exiting through the front door, Hussein could get a chance to reenter through the back—over the political corpse of the PLO leadership—and assume the role of Protector of Palestine.

But whatever plots are being hatched behind the scenes, Hussein's renunciation of any claim over Palestine reflects the will and determination of the popular insurrection in the Occupied Territories. The Palestinians had repudiated his sponsorship for years and Hussein's move must be seen, at least in part, as a recognition of this. Thus, while the PLO is busy drawing up plans for its bantustan on the West Bank and Gaza, the *intifada* has introduced a new element into the complex tangle of Middle East politics—one which could create an opening for independent working-class struggle against Zionism, imperialism *and* the Arab ruling classes.

Contradictions of the Israeli Occupation

While the "revolution of stones" cannot possibly triumph over the armed might of Israel, it *has* brought the contradictions at the heart of the Zionist behemoth into stark relief. Israel can neither live with the Occupied Territories nor without them. Enforcing the occupation further militarizes the entire

Jewish opinion, and although an overwhelming majority of Israeli Jews have rallied behind the government for the time being, the Zionist consensus within Israel could ultimately be endangered.

Yet the Occupied Territories cannot easily be given up. Zionist ideology holds that the annexation of "Eretz Israel" (Greater Israel, including "Judea" and "Samaria," the Old Testament names for the West Bank) represents the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. It was in the name of a god-given Jewish mandate that Palestine was colonized and the Palestinians driven from their homeland in 1948. Carrying this mandate to its logical conclusion is thus the overriding imperative of a Zionist state now more than ever in the grip of religious fanatics.

In the course of fulfilling its "destiny," Israel has also acquired important extra-theological reasons for maintaining the occupation: the income generated by a complex web of taxes, licenses, customs and excise revenues, as well as the lucrative captive market which the impoverished inhabitants provide for Israeli manufacturers and retailers. Equally important is the reservoir of cheap Arab labor supplied by the Occupied Territories. Discriminatory regulations designed by the occupation authorities to destroy Palestinian agriculture and manufacturing have further increased the supply of low-cost labor for Israeli entrepreneurs. Control of the West Bank has also given Israel access to two aquifers, which supply 35 percent of its water. Palestinians have been forbidden to drill new wells, while the government has seized or closed many of those previously operated by Arab farmers. The Zionist settlers have virtually unrestricted access to draw water. The result is that in the West Bank, 60,000 settlers consume more of this precious resource than the 850,000 Palestinian residents! (see Israel Shahak in the July-September issue of *Race & Class*).

To date over a third of Gaza and 60 percent of the land of the West Bank have been seized and is being parcelled out to Israeli settlers and "developers." There have been numerous cases of Jewish settlers uprooting olive and almond trees, and even bulldozing topsoil on those lands which are still in the possession of the Palestinian inhabitants. Disputes over land titles are now handled by a military review board which has generally turned a blind eye to the "unorthodox" methods used by their countrymen. The government has pursued a policy of encouraging Jewish colonization (known as the "Judaization" of the territories) with lucrative subsidies. (For an illuminating discussion of the economic aspects of the Zionist occupation see "The Price of Peace" in the March-April issue of *This Magazine*.)

The complaints of Israeli employers that the *intifada* is interrupting the supply of cheap Arab labor from the Occupied Territories and seriously damaging their businesses, is evidence of the dependency of the Israeli economy on the super-exploitation of these workers. This is a fundamental contradiction for the Zionist ruling class—its attempts to create a "Greater Israel" have meant increased reliance upon Arab labor. The parallel with South Africa is unmistakable. A nationwide strike by Arab workers in Israel last December in solidarity with the uprising in the Occupied Territories demonstrated the growing importance of Arab labor within the Israeli economy, and revealed a weapon far more potent than firebombs or stones. This strike signaled to the Zionists that, should they continue with their "Iron Fist" policies, they risk an uprising by "their own" Arab population.

Tannenbaum-SYGMA

Peace Now demonstration brands Israel as Goliath

society, while simultaneously eroding the morale of the army. Twenty-four Israeli soldiers are currently imprisoned for refusing to serve in the Occupied Territories. A document published last March by the Israeli Socialist Left (Shasi) noted:

"The prestige of the IDF has suffered a serious blow. It is difficult to square the myths about bravery, efficiency, and resourcefulness with the reality of the brutal, ugly, and vicious actions against a civilian population. The pride about 'purity of arms' and 'the moral level' of the army lies buried under a hill of stones."

Professional armies are in general adversely affected by being assigned police functions against civilian populations. An article in the Summer 1988 issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* comments on this phenomenon with regard to the *intifada*:

"This need to use violence against unarmed civilians may create two kinds of reaction, say the psychologists. On the one end of the continuum a 'moral apathy' may develop, which may lead the subject to resort to violence without discrimination and often without functional justification. On the other end, it may lead to inner agonies such as depression, nightmares, and the propensity to disobey....Both extremes lead to an erosion of military discipline: moral apathy may lead to excessive use of violence even against military orders; the depressive reaction may lead to attempts at 'service dodging' and desertion."

The occupation also imposes an economic burden which can only be ameliorated by ever greater infusions of U.S. aid, which in 1985 was already running at a staggering \$1,250 per capita. The brutal suppression of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories has widened the already existing rift in American

Manchester Guardian Weekly

It is often argued by Zionists and their apologists that peace would be possible in the Middle East if only the Arabs would accept the “right of Israel to exist.” But acceptance of the Zionist state would mean condoning a political entity founded upon what a famous UN resolution correctly described as a form of racism.

All major political factions in Israel, from the fascistic Kach party to the “Peace Now” movement, share the racial-theocratic definition of the state central to Zionist ideology. Israel is legally held to be the exclusive “state of the Jewish people.” Although some 750,000 Arabs are second-class Israeli citizens, first-class citizenship is reserved for those who qualify under traditional Jewish law, i.e., anyone born of a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism by a rabbi. Anyone in the world who meets either criterion automatically qualifies for citizenship under the Law of Return. Thus a Jewish American, who has never been to Israel in his life, has citizenship rights in Haifa, while a Haifa-born Palestinian refugee has no right to live in the land of his birth!

This definition of citizenship also underpins the continuing dispossession of the Palestinian population. As the late Moshe Dayan—the Zionist hero of the 1967 war—brutally admitted:

“We came here to a country that was populated by Arabs, and we are building here a Hebrew, Jewish state....Instead of the Arab villages Jewish villages were established. You even do not know the names of these villages....There is not a single settlement that was not established in the place of a former Arab village.”

—*Haaretz*, 4 April 1969

The Jewish National Fund admits that confiscated Palestinian property amounts to 88 percent of the land of Israel (*Jewish Villages in Israel*, p.xxi, quoted in Lehn and Davis, *The*

Jewish National Fund). All of these properties were vested under the Absentee Property Law of 1950 with the Custodian of Absentee Property to be administered solely for the Jewish people. The fanatical gun-toting Gush Emunim “pioneers,” who today rob the Arabs of their land in the Occupied Territories, are merely continuing the historic act of usurpation in which the state of Israel was conceived. It is precisely because these “settlers” are carrying out the original Zionist mandate that no major faction on the Israeli political spectrum is willing to defy them.

Zionism, which has always insisted that Jews cannot be assimilated into “gentile society,” was a minority current among European Jews, before the Nazi holocaust. It is one of history’s most bitter ironies that Hitler, by inflicting genocide upon the Jews, has posthumously succeeded in converting many of his victims to the twisted logic of racism. The fascist extermination of six million European Jews was an unparalleled and ghastly crime. But it can only be invoked in justification of current Zionist terror by those who have abandoned all hope of overcoming racism through social struggle, and instead look for their salvation to the victory of their own exclusive racial, ethnic or religious grouping. If mutual hatred and slaughter among peoples and nations is an unalterable fact of human existence, the best that one can hope for is to be a victimizer rather than a victim. This is the suicidal reasoning with which the Zionists have led the Jews of Israel into their present cul-de-sac.

Zionist “Solutions” For Palestinians

The *intifada* has spurred discussion in Israel about possible “solutions” to the “Palestinian problem.” An option favored by

many within Shamir's right-wing Likud coalition is annexation of the West Bank and Gaza with Palestinians formally excluded from citizenship rights. But within the framework of Zionism, population statistics provide the opposition Labor Party with the most cogent argument against this course. Nearly 1.5 million Palestinians now reside in the Occupied Territories, in addition to those within Israel itself. Annexation would therefore bring 2.25 million Palestinians under Israeli jurisdiction. With a birthrate much higher than that of Israel's 4 million Jews, Palestinians would one day "dilute" the Jewish majority, and hence pose a threat to Israel's exclusively Jewish character. Annexation would also impose the necessity of permanently repressing a huge and rebellious subject population.

Another proposal being discussed is that of the "resettlement" of the Arab inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza. It should not be forgotten that talk of "resettlement" was the prologue to Hitler's "final solution" of the "Jewish problem" in Europe. Proposals of this nature, though commonly associated with Meir Kahane's fascistic Kach party, are not the exclusive property of the Zionist ultra-right. Israeli "dove" Abba Eban, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, was among those who "proposed that all the [Palestinian] refugees be settled in Arab states, especially in Syria and Iraq" in the wake of the 1967 war (*Davar*, 19 February, quoted by Israel Shahak in *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, Summer 1988). Mass expulsion of the Palestinians from the Occupied Territories is now being openly discussed within the Zionist political establishment. No one imagines that such a massive population transfer could be accomplished by friendly persuasion; it would mean a bloodletting beside which the 1982 massacres of Sabra and Shatila would pale in comparison. The very fact that such an option can be seriously considered is an indication of the racist logic of Zionism.

The option considered most "realistic" by every one from Labor Party leader Shimon Perez to the Israeli "doves" of Peace Now, and endorsed by both Washington and Moscow, is "trading territory for peace." According to this scenario, Israel would relinquish the most densely populated portions of the West Bank and Gaza, which would then be constituted as an independent Palestinian mini-state.

Jerome Segal, the left-Zionist founder of the "Jewish Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Peace" revealed the logic behind the mini-state proposal when he wrote that, "It would win the support of the PLO and is the only likely basis on which the PLO would formally abandon the right to return to the land and villages lost in 1948." He pointed out that no military supplies could reach the state without passing through either Jordan or Israel. "The foreign policy of such a mini-state would be dominated by its links to the Israeli economy and by its national-security realities" (*Los Angeles Times*, 16 February).

Such a tiny "Palestinian state" carved out of the West Bank and Gaza (which taken together constitute less than a fifth of the area of pre-war Palestine) would be divided by Israeli territory, sandwiched between Jordan and Egypt, and possess scant economic resources. The notion that it could even physically accommodate 2.5 million diaspora Palestinians—let alone satisfy their national aspirations—is simply absurd. This would be comparable to the black South African masses accepting the phony independence of the bantustans as their share of South Africa. Indeed, even now the Gaza Strip with its 650,000 Palestinians packed into 100 square miles of desert is often compared to Soweto, since many of its workers use it only

as a dormitory for work inside Israel. This reality would hardly be eliminated by running up the PLO flag and issuing a new set of postage stamps.

The PLO and the Mini-State

The PLO is currently supporting the proposal for an international peace conference to resolve the Palestinian question. In a 13 September address to the European Parliament in Strasbourg, Arafat suggested that either the UN or a consortium of European imperialists could administer the West Bank and Gaza as a transitional step toward establishing a mini-state on those territories.

In 1971 the Palestinian National Congress was proclaiming its:

"Firm opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state on any part of the Palestinian Homeland on the basis that any attempt to establish such a state falls within the plans to liquidate the Palestinian question."

—*Free Palestine*, April 1971

By 1974 the PLO had changed its tune and proposed to establish a national authority on any territory it could obtain. This retreat was justified by PLO spokesman Abu Iyad by the need to:

"read history so as to extract lessons for ourselves. What were the mistakes of our previous leaders?...Their mistake was adhering to our people's historical rights without adopting stage-by-stage programs of struggle under the obtaining conditions."

—Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within*

The "obtaining conditions" Iyad referred to were the result of a series of defeats inflicted on the Palestinians by Zionism, U.S. imperialism and the Arab regimes. Arafat began his political career as a disciple of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian military strongman and self-appointed leader of the "Arab revolution." But in 1970, the very same Nasser abandoned his alliance with the Soviet Union in favor of a rapprochement with American imperialism and accepted the "peace plan" then being touted by William Rogers, U.S. Secretary of State.

The Rogers Plan called on Israel to give back the Occupied Territories to Egypt and Jordan in exchange for recognition of Israel. Nasser and Jordanian King Hussein thought that this deal would lead to the satisfaction of their territorial demands and considered the Palestinians expendable. The massive Palestinian presence in Jordan was a constant threat to Hussein's regime. Assured that Nasser would not intervene on their behalf, Hussein proceeded to massacre thousands of Palestinians in Jordan during the infamous 1970 "Black September" bloodbath. The Rogers Plan was never accepted by Israel or pursued by the United States.

In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon (where the PLO had been driven by Hussein) with the object of wiping out the Palestinian camps. In the wake of the Battle of Beirut, a U.S.-sponsored United Nations "peacekeeping force" intervened and persuaded the PLO to withdraw its armed units from Lebanon in exchange for assurances that the "peacekeepers" would protect the remaining Palestinian refugees. The value of these assurances was demonstrated when Israel took advantage of the PLO withdrawal to unleash the reactionary Lebanese Christian Phalange on the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila.

The lesson to be drawn from these historic defeats is the folly of relying on imperialists or Arab potentates to protect the

interests of the Palestinian people. But this is a lesson the petty-bourgeois PLO leadership is incapable of learning. Like even the most liberal and enlightened of his Zionist foes, Arafat simply cannot envision a political reality fundamentally different from the one that exists. He opposes the Middle Eastern status quo of imperialist spheres of influence, rapacious oil sheiks and murderous national hatreds only to the extent that there is no place in it for the Palestinians.

The experience of oppression does not automatically make revolutionaries of its victims. The Zionists argued that there could be no answer to the persecution of the Jews without the support of one or another imperialist power for the establishment of a "homeland." It is the same "pragmatism" that sends Arafat scurrying from one Arab capital to another, weaving intrigue upon Byzantine intrigue, in the vain hope that some new combination of circumstances and political alignments will remedy the historic crime against the Palestinian people.

The PLO's authority among the Palestinian masses derives not from its leadership of the uprising (which it did not initiate) but from its symbolic importance as the historic representative of Palestinian national aspirations. The Zionist ideologues, who deny the existence of a Palestinian nation, refuse to negotiate directly with an organization that claims to be its "sole legitimate representative." Thus, the more the PLO is anathematized by the Zionists, the more its banner is embraced by the Palestinians as a symbol of national identity. Yet the reality does not measure up to the image. While certainly worthy of defense against Zionist persecution, the PLO is in fact led by petty-bourgeois nationalists bereft of any coherent political or social outlook. Arafat himself is famous for his proclivity for changing political alliances and demands in accordance with the shifting sands of war and diplomacy in the Middle East.

Arafat cannot make himself more acceptable to the imperialists without continually giving ground to the Zionist state,

which is imperialism's most powerful regional ally. He has thus responded to each Palestinian defeat by further moderating the PLO's demands. Contrary to Zionist propaganda, Arafat has on numerous occasions indicated his willingness to accept UN Resolutions 242 and 338. This formula characterizes the Palestinians as "refugees" rather than a nationality, and calls for Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist on the condition that the Israelis withdraw from the Occupied Territories.

The PLO's current call for UN control of the territories is more maneuvering of the kind that paved the road to "Black September" and the Lebanese massacres. In time, weariness with Arafat's fruitless diplomatic shell game is bound to create a crisis of confidence in PLO leadership among the Palestinian masses. Far more sinister forces—Islamic fundamentalists inspired by the example of Khomeini's Iran—are already raising their heads in Gaza and the West Bank.

For a Trotskyist Party in Israel/Palestine!

The answer to Zionist terror does not consist in the harder Palestinian nationalist line advocated by Arafat's "rejectionist" opponents within the PLO. The road to Palestinian liberation lies through a common struggle of Arab and Hebrew workers against all capitalist oppressors in the region. Amid the burning national antagonisms of today's Middle East, such a prospect may appear "unrealistic." The alternative, however, is a continued cycle of desperate revolt and brutal repression.

The fact that the Israeli economy is already dependent upon a working class comprised of both Arab and Hebrew workers provides the objective basis for their joint struggle. However, such a struggle will not emerge spontaneously. It will require the presence of a consciously revolutionary force—a Trotskyist party—determined to take advantage of every opportunity to forge links between the workers of both nationalities. While siding unambiguously with the Pales-

tinians in their struggle against national oppression, a party aspiring to proletarian leadership in the Middle East must not adapt to the prevailing nationalist consciousness of the Arab workers, but base itself on a firm programmatic foundation of internationalist communism.

In the first place, there must be a clear understanding that no genuine solution to the Palestinian question is possible within the framework of U.S. imperialist hegemony, which is the main prop of reactionary forces around the globe. Israel is not the only regime closely allied with U.S. imperialism in the Middle East today. Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are all heavily dependent on economic and/or military underwriting from their patron.

At the same time, while they are clients, none of these regimes can be regarded simply as U.S. puppets. Zionism contains an expansive dynamic of its own, the “excesses” of which are a source of embarrassment to Washington. In addition, the continued hostility between Israel and reactionary Arab regimes is a real obstacle to the American aim of cementing an anti-Soviet alliance in the Middle East. But U.S. imperialism, precisely because it is not all-powerful, must form alliances with regimes whose imperatives it does not necessarily share. Zionism will continue to act as an imperialist gendarme in the Middle East only so long as it is assured of U.S. backing for its own racist rule and territorial ambitions. This is the basis of the historic deal between Zionism and imperialism, and Washington realizes that to renege on it would endanger the entire structure of capitalist exploitation in the region.

The Trotskyist approach to the national question in the Middle East is profoundly different from that of petty-bourgeois nationalists and their leftist camp followers. Our program derives from the first four congresses of the Communist International, led by Lenin and Trotsky, and the further elaboration of this question by the international Spartacist tendency of the 1960’s and 70’s, when it was still a revolutionary organization.

Leninists solidarize with all oppressed peoples in the face of national persecution; hence we are on the side of Palestinian resistance to Zionist police-state terror. This includes support for the demand for immediate and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. While we reject the various “mini-state” schemes as incapable of satisfying the legitimate national demands of the Palestinians, we nonetheless defend the right of the Palestinians to establish their own government in the Occupied Territories as a deformed and necessarily inadequate expression of their right to self-determination.

There is no such thing as an inherently “progressive” or “reactionary” people. Today’s victims can easily become tomorrow’s despots, as the history of Zionism attests. And it must be recognized that, within the present boundaries of Israel and the Occupied Territories, there are two distinctive nationalities, one of which speaks Hebrew.

The PLO standpoint is that Israel is merely a settler-colonial state, and the Jews within it are a religious grouping. From this it follows that Moslems, Jews and Christians should simply be merged into a single Palestinian nation. But by any objective historical or empirical standard, the Hebrew-speaking community in Israel is a nation, sharing a common language and a common territory—stolen though it was from the Arabs. One cannot simply *wish* a nation out of existence.

For Leninists, all nations, including the Jews in Israel, have a right to self-determination. That right, however, belongs to

the Jews who currently reside in Israel, and *not*, as the Zionists maintain, to every descendant of the original Twelve Tribes of Israel throughout the world. It is, in other words, a right of the Hebrew-speaking people of the Middle East, and not a “Jewish” right. Moreover, the state of Israel does *not* represent the legitimate self-determination of the Hebrew-speaking peoples because it is a living denial of the national rights of the oppressed Palestinians.

The Zionist fortress can and must be destroyed by unleashing the class struggle within it. But the Hebrew-speaking working class can never be broken from Zionism without the assurance that it will neither be “driven into the sea” or itself become part of a subject nationality. Like the Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland, the Palestinians and the Israeli Jews are two geographically interpenetrated peoples. Where different peoples occupy distinct regions, self-determination can be exercised by a simple political divorce, creating two different national entities, as Norway once seceded from Sweden. But where two peoples cohabit the same territory, the bourgeois nationalist aim of creating a separate nation-state can only be realized by mass expulsions of one or another of the populations. Israel was consolidated in exactly this way.

The only alternative to this kind of mutual slaughter of peoples is the subordination of national divisions to a common struggle aimed at ridding the region of all oppressors—imperialist, Zionist or Arab. In this context, the victory of the working class of one nationality must be a prelude to the triumph of the class as a whole—not as a victory for one people at the expense of another. The result of such a struggle would be a voluntary association of peoples encompassing the entire region—a *socialist federation of the Middle East*.

In answer to those practitioners of the “art of the possible” who dismiss such a solution as impractical, we refer them to a concrete example of the implementation of such a program, albeit in a partial and deformed way, in an area of the world that had long been a synonym for national hatred: the Balkans. During the Nazi occupation of this corner of Eastern Europe, Tito forged an army to fight the fascist invaders. In Tito’s army, nationalities that had until a few years before been at each other’s throats—Serbs, Croats, Macedonians, Slovenes and Montenegrins—were welded together into a common fighting force.

It would be useless to speculate on what specific geographical or political form a socialist federation of the Middle East will take. The antagonisms that today divide the proletariat along national lines can never be overcome unless the right of all currently existing national groups to associate or disassociate from other nationalities is fully respected. The socialist federation slogan expresses our confidence that a proletariat aware of its class interests is fully capable of finding a formula that protects the rights of all.

The seemingly implacable national hostilities in Israel/Palestine can only be equitably resolved through the struggle for a bi-national Arab/Hebrew workers state as part of a socialist federation of the Middle East. Such a struggle requires the construction of a Trotskyist party, which upholds the right to national self-determination of the oppressed Palestinians, and is based on a program which links the democratic and economic demands of the proletariat of *both* nations to the historic necessity for the overthrow of the racist Zionist state and the reactionary Arab regimes of the region.■