



Palestine

Concerning the long-term solution

30 January 2010, by **Camile Dagher**

I will begin my intervention on the subject of the long-term solution with some rapid remarks about the last savage war in Gaza. It is a coincidence, tragic, certainly, but at the same time useful, considering that this war took place only a few weeks before the holding of this seminar which brings us together today.

This, in one way or another, facilitates our task, especially since it will perhaps constitute a real turning point in the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of the liberation of the Palestinian people. This war is rich in results and lessons of great importance, which I will summarize as follows:

A. It re-emphasizes, in a clearer way, the suffocating dead end of the Zionist entity, as an artificial state that is so fragile that it can only survive by perpetually aggressive behaviour. This tendency has become for it an Achilles' heel, as it represents a permanent, bloody headlong rush forward, which will inevitably lead to its total bankruptcy and perhaps to its destruction.

B. It has exposed, more and more sharply, the criminal nature of this entity, which has gone so far as to perpetrate the worst carnages, using internationally prohibited weapons, against children, women, old men, and other defenceless civilians.

C. It has demonstrated, even more clearly, the de facto alliance that exists between this entity and the so-called moderate Arab regimes, and among them, in particular, the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas. It has also highlighted the fact that the survival of the one of the two parties to this alliance depends on the survival of the other.

D. It has shown that broader and broader layers of the Arab masses are ready to express in an effective way their solidarity with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian resistance, both against the regimes of their own countries and against Israel and the American administration. It has shown, moreover, that many people in the world are ready to express their active solidarity with the Palestinian people, in particular in the face of the monstrous crimes perpetrated by Israel.

E. It has furthermore demonstrated the danger that this regime, as it exists at present, constitutes for world peace, especially since it possesses weapons of mass destruction. And the leader of an influential party ("Israel Our Home") did not hesitate to ask for them to be used and for Gaza to be burned with nuclear weapons!

I hope that the gravity of what recently happened in Gaza is sufficient to push us, as an international revolutionary movement, to rise to the

level of the tasks that are necessary and to express our attitude by defining a firm position in relation to the Zionist state and to the long-term solution, a position which is obligatory for all the sections of the International. So this seminar should reach an agreement on at least a preliminary draft of the elements of this position, so that the International Committee which will meet in a few days' time puts it on its agenda and recommends making it one of the fundamental questions that the next congress will discuss, and on which it will take decisions that will hopefully be those that are appropriate.

Before exploring the elements of this solution, I believe that we need to highlight a certain number of ideas and basic principles whose expression will help us to develop a conception that attains maximum clarity and universality. These elements are:

Firstly: The need to accelerate everything that is likely to bring closer the moment when the Palestinian people will be able to freely exert its right to self-determination, over all its historic territory, before the repercussions of the present status quo lead to great catastrophes which could take on a universal character in the not too distant future.

We all know how Israel which, in the past, destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor of Tammuz in 1981, has tried,

in recent years, to get the American administration to bombard the reactors that are scattered over vast distances in Iran, in order to prevent that country from developing its capacities for uranium enrichment, on the pretext that it is seeking to have the atomic bomb, whereas Israel has already hundreds of nuclear warheads. Israel is trying to obtain, if the US administration does not act itself, permission for the Zionist state to unleash itself such a fatal and insane adventure, which would have catastrophic consequences which would probably not be limited to the Middle-East, but would also extend to the whole world.

Secondly: Any solution will have to take into account the nature of Israel, not only in its capacity as an entity built, at its origin, on the uprooting of a people from its land and its thousand-year-old homeland, and on this people being dispossessed of its property, wrongfully, by violence and aggression, and by committing crimes against humanity seldom seen in history. Israel also has to be seen as an instrument armed to the teeth, in the service of the plans of world imperialism, and in particular American imperialism, to subjugate the peoples of our region, to plunder their wealth, to prevent them from uniting, moving forward and attaining modernity; and also with the intention of preventing them from securing conditions of prosperity, a dignified life, real sovereignty and independence. Let us add to that the involvement of this entity in American attempts to divide even further our countries and to create dissensions and wars - civil, religious, national, even tribal and other sorts of wars.

Thirdly: As a result the Palestinian question does not exclusively concern the original people of that country, but all the Arab peoples which are suffering so many wrongs because of the creation of Israel, because of its execrable racist reality, and because of the role which is assigned to it, against the paramount interests of the Arab nation as a whole; Israel, which is a mini-imperialism in the service of world imperialist hegemony.

This is why it is impossible to imagine a solution to this question without

taking into account the tasks of the Arab revolution, in general, which involve the elimination of all the ways in which this hegemony affects our countries and its consequences, and also bringing closer its end on a world level.

Fourthly: Even though the tendency towards capitulation on the part of more Arab regimes, even of all the Arab regimes - the nature of whose ruling classes facilitates them taking this road - in the direction of the recognition of Israel and the establishment of all kinds of relations with it, the Arab peoples would probably continue to be opposed to that, and would be hostile to any serious normalisation of relations with Israel, as is the case with regard to the masses in Egypt, Jordan and Mauritania. This will have as a consequence, in future circumstances, the collapse of these relations and the reactivation of the struggle, even military, against the Zionist entity.

Fifthly: The Palestinian question would have to become again, as it seemed to be in the years following the creation of the Zionist state, the principal motor of the process of change in the Arab region. It is this element which has been diluted, denatured, even eliminated, temporarily at least, because of the treasons, the concessions and the transactions of the majority of the Arab and Palestinian political forces which had carried the banner of liberation, progress and change, from the creation of Israel until now.

Moreover, insofar as this question remains alive, through in particular the consolidation and the radicalisation of resistance, not only on the level of the Palestinian people, but also among the Arab peoples in general, it could evolve in such a way as to become a principal motor, this time, for revolutionary change, throughout the Arab world, and possibly beyond.

Sixthly and lastly: At a time which has practically seen the end of the old colonialism and the liberation of dozens of countries which lived under occupation, the Palestinian people has remained the only one deprived of its right to freedom, independence and

self-determination, and this in spite of dozens of resolutions which have been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations since 1948, resolutions which recognize its rights and which call for them to be respected and put into effect.

At the end of the programme established for this seminar, its authors consider, on the question of the long-term solution, three possibilities: the first is the two-state solution; the second is that of a single state, and the third is that of a bi-national state.

In reality, and in spite of the fact that the two-state solution is posed, apparently, as a transitional solution, I believe that it needs to be rejected in advance, especially if we take into consideration what Israel has done up to now, in the West Bank, as a whole, including Jerusalem, through the creation of a large number of colonies where today hundreds of thousands of Jewish occupiers live, without forgetting the wall of separation which Israel continues to build within the territories occupied in 1967, and which is in practice chipping away an important part of these territories; without forgetting, also, the circular motorways which are doing the same and which Palestinians are forbidden to use. Moreover, Israel insists on occupying a broad band of territory between the West Bank and the River Jordan, that is to say, all along the frontier with Jordan. To that, it is necessary to add the ban on the inhabitants of the West Bank using the subterranean water that Israel draws and uses for the needs for its inhabitants; as well as the policy that it wants to impose on (Arab) East Jerusalem so that this city remains completely under its control.

To this should be added ban on the so-called Palestinian "state", if it comes into existence, arming itself, except for the purpose of domestic repression.

Furthermore, the Israelis refuse absolutely to implement any international resolution concerning the return of refugees to their country. They have even begun to unveil their plans to expel the Arabs of 1948, who live within the boundaries of the

Green Line, towards the territories of the "state" in question.

The refusal of this solution thus becomes something particularly urgent, both for the reasons indicated above and because of the fact that no Palestinian entity on the West Bank of the Jordan could have any chance of survival, especially since it will be caught in a vice, between the Zionist state to the west and the Hashemite Kingdom to the east, the Palestinian population of which suffered for 19 years, during the period that was called the unity of the two banks, the brutal oppression and coercion exercised by the Hashemite monarchy and its security services. Moreover, this state would absolutely not constitute a solution for millions of Palestinians of the Diaspora who would remain deprived of their right to return to their homeland and their property, a right that is recognized by the resolutions of the United Nations. These resolutions contain elements that are fundamental, even if they are not sufficient, for an advanced solution of the Palestinian question.

In any case, our refusal of the two-state solution does not mean that we have a nihilistic attitude towards a possible evolution of the ongoing and developing struggle, if ever this struggle leads to forcing Israel to withdraw from territories in the West Bank, as it has already done from Gaza and Gaza (and as it did under the pressure of the resistance, in Lebanon), without conditions and negotiations with Israel.

These resolutions, starting with Resolution 194, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, about the return of the Palestinian refugees to their country and their property - a resolution which was readopted every year up to the end of the 1960s - and, in particular, the resolutions adopted between 1969 and 1975, can constitute a fairly serious starting point towards outlining an adequate solution, insofar as these resolutions highlight the following points:

- The need to allow the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination "without interference from outside", in addition to its "right to independence and national

sovereignty" (Resolution 3236 of November 22, 1974).

- The need to allow the Palestinian people to exercise its right to return to its country and its property in historic Palestine.

- To consider Zionism as one of the forms of racism and as a threat to international peace and security, even though the General Assembly annulled its resolution at the beginning of the 1990s, at the time of the sole hegemony of the United States; knowing that this purely circumstantial annulment had no impact on the moral value of this resolution, which must remain a guide for all the people of the world, whom it had called on to oppose this racist and imperialist ideology (resolution 3379, adopted by the General Assembly, 10/11/1975).

- To declare the legality of the struggle of peoples subjected to imperialist and foreign domination, - including the Palestinian people -, to free themselves from this domination "by all the means in their power, including armed struggle" (Point 1 of Resolution 3382 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted 10/11/1975).

- To consider the rights of the Palestinian people referred to above as inalienable rights, and to firmly condemn the governments which refuse the right of self-determination of the peoples to which this right has been recognized, in particular the Palestinian people, considering that "complete respect for the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine is an essential element for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle-East" (Point C of Resolution 2672 adopted by the General Assembly, 8 December 1970).

Of course, complete respect for the rights of the Palestinian people and its right to exercise these rights effectively, including its right to self-determination, its right to independence and national sovereignty, the right to return, both for those who were uprooted and driven out in 1948 and for those who suffered the same fate during the 1967 war and afterwards (see, on this

subject, United Nations Resolution 2672 of 18/12/1970, which calls on "the taking of effective and immediate measures to ensure their return without delay"); **this respect cannot be genuinely guaranteed without the dismantlement of the present Zionist state**, which should be a fundamental element of any final just, durable and viable solution; even though this is in contradiction with the consciousness that has up to now dominated among the ranks of the broad Jewish masses in Israel.

We argue this while knowing that such a perspective cannot be implemented without being shared by these masses and by the Palestinian people. In particular, this applies a radical change of this consciousness, such as to free, first of all the Jewish workers, and then the broadest sectors of the population of the State of Israel, from Zionist ideology.

However, this profound transformation in the consciousness of the Jews of Israel is a very complex question and requires a no less profound change in the conditions of the present struggle and in its circumstances and, in particular, the coming together of three factors:

A Palestinian and Arab programmatic vision concerning the future of the entire region and the Jewish presence in this region, especially in Palestine. A vision which takes into consideration the interests of many generations among the Jews who were born and grew up there, who have no other homeland and who have legitimate aspirations to continue to live in this country in peace, far from any discrimination and any injustice towards them; at the same time we ask them not to practise discrimination and injustice against the others who have a right to this same land and this same country. This should happen simultaneously, with the confirmation of the right of those Jews who are of Arab origin to return, if they so desire, to their countries of origin and enjoy full rights of citizenship there.

To throw every effort into breaking the present military balance of forces, which is completely in favour of Israel; this is something which would not be

limited to the Arab region alone, but would include countries in this anxious and troubled East, among them Iran, in particular, and possibly Turkey and Pakistan, if these two countries experience in the future a change in their regimes in a progressive and anti-imperialist direction.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to continue the armed struggle against the Zionist state, wherever that is possible (in Gaza, in the West Bank, in South Lebanon, even in Golan, on the subject of which it will be necessary to bring together the conditions and create suitable circumstances to launch a resistance there that the Syrian regime has always prevented from developing, a regime which is now seeking to obtain the total recovery of the territory through a "new Camp David").

Rehabilitate the programme of the Arab Revolution which includes, among other things, a sustained effort to eliminate the current partition, but also to eliminate imperialist hegemony over the wealth of our region, on the one hand, and the power of those who govern it, on the other. We should not forget that in this context we have to act in such a way that the giant of the people gets out from under the yoke of the various Arab regimes, and that serious efforts are undertaken to achieve a real democracy that allows the broadest mobilization of the masses and their greater participation in the implementation of the above-mentioned programme. This programme must combine the tasks of national liberation and political democracy with the tasks of social democracy, and thus open the way for the contribution of our peoples to the progressive construction of a liberating socialism, in correlation with the contributions of other peoples, everywhere in the world, to the same effort.

What can play a fundamental role in such a process is the renunciation by the Palestinian people of illusions in the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, built on the Oslo agreements; the stopping of all forms of negotiations with the Zionist entity; the rehabilitation of the option of popular resistance in all its forms,

including, and especially, armed resistance, with, simultaneously the rebuilding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) on this basis, in order to integrate into it, democratically and through elections, all the resistance forces and, in particular, the re-launching of the experience of the popular committees which were responsible during the first Intifada for organizing the daily life of the resisting people.

This is a choice which, in spite of its extreme difficulty, is probably the only one which promises to launch a popular Arab and world solidarity movement, enormously more effective, with the Palestinian people and its cause, a solidarity whose first signs appeared during the recent war against Gaza. This movement could be reinforced insofar as the resistance movement of this people would be able of freeing itself from its relations with the various Arab regimes and of developing completely different relations with the broad masses who are the victims of exploitation, injustice and oppression at the hands of these regimes.

No less important would be the fact that these masses could produce, in the context of their struggles against this reality, leaderships capable of organizing and leading their struggle and directing it towards the simultaneous achievement of the tasks of national liberation and those of social liberation.

This could in time represent a prelude to the modification of the circumstances which have kept the movement of these masses, during the last few bloody weeks, within definite limits, so that they were unable to force the existing Arab governments take measures and positions on the level of the gravity of the crimes committed before the eyes of the whole world against the population of Gaza, besieged, not only by the Israeli war machine, but also by the hell of official Arab official complicity.

It is truly regrettable to see that the growing, though slow, radicalisation taking place in the mass movement in many Arab countries, including occupied Palestine, is initially impelled by the radicalisation of religious

political movements which are at present bearing the brunt of the confrontation with American imperialism and Israel, in the context of the very long absence of left forces ready to carry out this task.

This shows the absolute necessity of seeing this Left again taking on a role which it has lost, and carrying once again a banner which it could not keep, the banner of national liberation. Only the Left is capable, if ever it succeeds in winning back its leading role in this domain, of successfully carrying out this task at the same time as conducting the social battle on the basis of a revolutionary programme of national and social liberation; a programme which would include, among its central tasks, the unification of the dispersed and disunited Arab world, in addition to being seriously committed to the path of socialist construction.

Such is the great challenge! A challenge not only for the Palestinian and Arab masses, but also for revolutionary Marxists everywhere in the world, who should give essential and growing support to these masses in their fight against Israel and world imperialism, the same support as they formerly gave to the Vietnamese people, and even much more. Support which would finally be of very great importance for the growth, which is possible and necessary, of a Palestinian and Arab revolutionary Left, ready to replace, in the not distant future, the present forces of resistance. A revolutionary Left would be the only one which could pose an equitable solution to the Palestinian question and seek to concretise it; a solution whose basic elements would be summarized, as is explained above, by the fact of making it possible for the Palestinian people to exercise its right to return its homeland and its property, as well as the right of self-determination in all its historic homeland and, consequently, the dismantling of the Zionist state, which is a racist entity, based, as it was stated in Resolution 3379 of the General Assembly of the United Nations, "on a racist imperialist ideology"; and especially to encourage the Israeli Jews to be integrated into a unified state belonging to all its citizens and which would be part of an

Arab Socialist Federation, while allowing them, in all the parts of Palestine where they would remain a clear majority, after the Palestinians had exercised their right of return and self-determination, to also exercise their own right to self-determination, in the way which was clearly formulated in the programmatic document of the Arab revolutionary Marxists in 1973-1974 under the title, "The Arab Revolution", stipulating as follows:

"It is in this precise context that is posed, therefore, the question of the present Jewish inhabitants of Israel, who would become a minority after the disappearance of the Zionist state. The programme of workers' democracy towards them, as towards any national group, is contrary to any chauvinism and was formerly clearly defined by Lenin: "No to any hegemony of any nation or any language, no to any persecution, any

injustice against a national minority". This means guaranteeing all civil and cultural rights to the Jewish inhabitants and total equality between Jews and Arabs. In the same way, workers' democracy implies recognising the right of the the Jewish workers to self-management in their areas, within the framework of the necessary political and economic centralism of the workers' state. This is the working-class programme for the solution of the Israeli problem".

The demand for the "right of the Israeli nation to self-determination", in the present circumstances, those of the survival of the Zionist state, could not be other than reactionary; but after the removal of the Zionist state and after the reconquest by the Palestinians of their rights, and only then, it would be possible to recognize the right to self-determination of the Jewish national minority in Palestine,

but on the very strict condition that the exercise of this right does not undermine the rights of any people; this means, above all, that the exercise of this right must be in harmony with the right of the Palestinian Arab people to self-determination. Moreover, the Arab revolution would not permit the creation of a state having expansionist ambitions, or of a state armed by imperialism. In any case, revolutionary Marxists in Israel should educate the Jewish proletariat in the perspective of a unified state, the only perspective which is compatible with the real interests of the proletariat, just as it is the duty of Arab revolutionaries to fight chauvinistic tendencies among the Arab workers.

Many people might think that such a solution is utopian. But I am not the only one who considers that the task of revolutionaries is to help make Utopia become reality.

Evolution of the "non-Islamic" national movement in Palestine since the 1980s

30 January 2010, by **Julien Salingue**

The starting point of the report will be the year 1987, because that marks a turning point, insofar as there can be turning points in history and politics, with the outbreak of the first Intifada. We obviously cannot understand these events and their consequences without looking further back, but given the time limits, I will try and cover what is essential, in a way that will necessarily be rapid and schematic.

The Palestinian national movement really began to develop after 1967 and of the defeat of the Arab armies and states by Israel during the Six Day War. Up until then, the Palestinian question had remained in the hands of the Arab states, whose control was expressed in the creation of the PLO in 1964, on the initiative of the states of the Arab League, in particular of

Nasser's Egypt. The Charter of the PLO specified for example that the organization did not exert any regional sovereignty over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

These territories were respectively administered by Jordan and Egypt, which, with different modalities and in the framework of a struggle for influence, equipped themselves with autonomous Palestinian "national" currents, while at the same time basing themselves on the local elites (in particular the great families of notables).

In reaction to this confiscation of the Palestinian question Fatah was formed, in 1959, by Palestinians exiled in Kuwait (Arafat, Kaddumi, Abu Jihad, Abu Iyad), who denounced the passivity of the Arab regimes since

1948 and asserted the "Palestinisation" of the struggle. They advocated a "people's war" (on the Algerian model), conducted by the Palestinian masses, and established bases of support in the refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, from where they multiplied, from 1965 onwards, armed operations against Israeli military targets.

With the defeat of 1967 Fatah gained in credibility, a credibility that was reinforced with the battle of Karameh, in 1968, where the Palestinian guerrillas held their own against the Israeli armed forces. This was a turning point and in 1968-69, the guerrilla organizations, with Fatah at their head, took control of the PLO, "Palestinised" its charter and considerably developed the organization, which had not been solidly implanted. The PLO developed

in the camps in neighbouring countries, because the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza made it impossible to establish guerrilla cells there.

The leadership of the PLO, although based outside the Palestinian territories, acquired legitimacy in the eyes of the populations of the interior, in particular after September 1970 when the massacres perpetrated by the Jordanian army in the Palestinian camps led to the population and nationalist feeling turning against Jordan and pro-Jordanian notables. In this way there developed in the interior a nationalist movement, strongly linked to the PLO, which it recognized as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, but which sought to have relative autonomy with respect to the leadership abroad. Several attempts at structuring the movement in the interior (the Palestinian National Front in 1972, the Committee of National Orientation in 1978) were taken in hand and scuttled by the leadership abroad.

The Fatah leadership of the PLO, which managed the financial resources of the organization, followed a policy which consisted of ensuring that it was the dominant force in the territories, basing itself on militant and popular local cadres, while preventing the emergence of a real leadership of the interior.

The Palestinian Left, mainly the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP) (which had a base in the Palestinian territories), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) gradually lost ground to Fatah. What is more, since the relationships of forces were different between the interior (where the Left was relatively strong) and the exterior (where Fatah was clearly dominant), the progressive establishment of control of the interior by the exterior contributed to this weakening.

Thus on the eve of the Intifada there was a national movement, structured around the PLO but with a certain number of dissensions, and a bureaucratized leadership of the PLO, which had come to favour a negotiated settlement from the middle of the

1970s onwards (witness Arafat's speech at the UN in 1974), refusing to leave too much autonomy to cadres of the interior who were more radicalized by the daily struggle against the occupation. We should not over-estimate these dissensions but we should be aware of them, because they explain many future developments.

The Intifada

The explosion of 1987, a consequence of the violence of the Israeli occupation and the development of Palestinian nationalism in the occupied territories since the 1970s, was neither programmed nor organized by the PLO. It was a real popular uprising which was not at the outset controlled or led by the Palestinian political organizations: the rioters who were arrested by the Israeli forces in the first weeks of the uprising were not known and/or organized militants.

Local leaders emerged, coming in particular from factions of the PLO, and a certain number of structures of self-organization arose, both at a local level (People's Committees) and at the national level (the Unified National Command of the uprising).

The demands, the forms of action and the dates of mobilization fixed by the UNC were taken up by the local People's Committees and the other structures. The UNC affirmed its allegiance to the PLO but was not regarded as a simple emanation of the Tunis-based leadership or as its relay in the Palestinian territories and asserted its autonomy (but in no case its independence) with respect to the leading bodies of the PLO. The UNC was at the beginning, "the instrument of a process of taking over the political initiative by the interior, to the detriment of the exterior" (J-F. Legrain). It was also the expression of the relationships of forces in the interior, since it respected parity between the organizations which were members of the PLO (contrary to the leadership of the PLO).

But from the summer of 1988, the relative autonomy of the UNC disappeared: under the pressure of

the Directorates of Political Affairs of the exterior (of Fatah but also of the PFLP and the DFLP), the cadres of the interior engaged in the UNC were dispossessed of political decision-making. From then on official statements were written in Tunis and factionalism gradually took over again in the occupied territories. By indirectly taking control of the legitimate framework of the leadership of the uprising, the leadership of the PLO ensured that it had taken over the function of representation of the population of the occupied territories, and could thus claim legitimacy to negotiate on their behalf.

In July 1988, the King of Jordan announced his decision to give up sovereignty over the West Bank of the Jordan. At the next meeting of the Palestinian National Council, in Algiers, in November, an independent state of Palestine on the territories occupied in 1967 was proclaimed, a proclamation accompanied by a recognition of UN resolution 242 and thus of Israel in its borders of 1949. By doing this, the PLO tried to base itself on the uprising in order to pose as an unavoidable and reasonable interlocutor in the framework of a hypothetical process of negotiation.

But the road was still long. Weakened considerably by its support for Saddam Hussein at the time of the Gulf War, and jostled by the divisive manoeuvres of Israel, which claimed to prefer to discuss with the leaders the interior, the leading core of the PLO ended up agreeing to negotiate in the strictest secrecy, on the basis of conditions that were extremely minimal, behind the backs of the Palestinians of the interior and the leading bodies of the PLO.

The United States and Israel made the following wager: the Arafat leadership is sufficiently weakened that it will agree to save its skin under conditions that are more than favourable to the Israelis but still sufficiently legitimate to get agreements accepted by a population that was crushed by five years of ferocious repression and was exhausted, agreements which were actually nothing but a capitulation: Oslo. The Oslo Agreements were in fact nothing but the resolution of the

old Israeli problem (to have a state that was both Jewish and democratic) on the basis of the Allon Plan (abandonment of the most densely populated zones to a subject Palestinian authority and maintenance of Israeli control over the major part of Palestine).

The Oslo years

Thus was the Palestinian Authority (PA) created: its real function, within the framework of the Zionist project (whatever might have been the intentions or the illusions of Arafat) was the maintenance of law and order in the autonomous Palestinian zones and the destruction of Palestinian resistance, in exchange for the construction of a pseudo-apparatus of state.

The principal problem of the leading core of the PA (Arafat and his close colleagues, Qorei, Abbas, Nabil Shaath) was to establish its political authority in a territory over which they did not have real sovereignty. It was thus necessary for the PA to ensure the support of the social forces of the interior, while neutralizing the forces of contestation (Islamic and, to a lesser extent, left forces) and preserving the essential levers of command in order to remain the only and unavoidable interlocutor of Israel in the continuous process of negotiations.

Powerful security forces were built, in which many Fatah militants of the first Intifada were recycled and at whose head were placed individuals who were reliable but legitimate in the occupied territories (Rajoub and Dahlan at the head of Preventive Security, an essential component of the apparatus of control of the autonomous zones). These security forces were characterised by their unfailing collaboration with the Israeli services, by numerous arrests and also by repression that was sometimes very violent (14 dead during a demonstration by Hamas-Jihad in Gaza in November 1994).

Having monopoly control over the flow of international financial aid to the PLO and building a state apparatus that was the major source of

employment in a society marked by the closing of the Israeli market to more than 100,000 Palestinian workers, Arafat established a vast network of clientele and a system of corruption at every level of the "Palestinian institutions" that were being established, accelerating the depoliticization of Fatah and of the whole of Palestinian society.

At the time of the legislative elections of 1996, recalcitrant Fatah leaders (for example Hussam Khader in Balata) were sidelined, while the leading core of the PLO did not hesitate to promote many local notables who had been conspicuous by their absence during the first Intifada, and to base itself on the great families. That guaranteed Fatah victory in the elections, but in fact very often local considerations overrode national considerations, which was a double-edged sword for the leadership of the PA: it tried to make sure it was the only force capable of exercising power on a national level, but at the same time it reinforced the centrifugal tendencies in Palestinian society, tendencies which were already considerably encouraged by the fragmentation that was the result of colonization and of the isolation of Gaza.

The legitimacy of the leadership of the PA rested on the past of the PLO and of Arafat and on the promise of liberation to come. But this legitimacy was exhausted during the Oslo years and disillusion quickly set in.

Many militants of Fatah, disorientated, abandoned the political terrain. The Palestinian Left was divided over Oslo: whereas the PCP (which had become the Palestinian People's Party, PPP) supported the process with timid reservations and even took part in the PA government, the PFLP and the DFLP took a wait-and-see attitude: critical of Oslo, they hardly dared to engage in confrontation with the leadership of the PA. Paralysed during the first years, the militants of the PFLP and part of the PPP fell back on NGOs and cultural centres in the refugee camps, deserting the national political terrain. This NGOisation of Palestinian political life (whose most outstanding figure is Mustapha Barghouthi)

contributed to the depoliticization and to the increasingly strong dependence of the critical "left" elements" on the sources of funds... which came from the sponsors of Oslo.

This attitude of "a foot inside, a foot outside" by the Left contributed to its weakening and the lack of initiative of these political forces left the field free for Hamas, whose attitude towards Oslo was unambiguous and which had a much more powerful network of associations (quicker to act and less dependent on the imperialist "godfathers"...))

Conscious of the limits of the process, confronted with a relative increase in criticism from the Left (which had been considerably weakened by the loss of prerogatives of the PLO to the advantage of the PA and by a wait-and-see attitude (PFLP, DFLP), and even by tail-endism (the CP, now the PPP, which took part fully in the setting up of the PA, even taking ministerial posts) and of part of Fatah, Arafat refused the "generous offers" of Barak at Camp David in the summer of 2000 and seized on the uprising of September 2000, which he had largely encouraged, to try (what illusions...) to modify the relationship of forces with Israel.

The uprising of September 2000

Although it would be exaggerated to say that Arafat organized the uprising, it is undeniable that he prepared for it and took steps to be able to control it as closely as possible. He favoured and supported individuals like Marwan Barghouthi, the incarnation of the militant wing of Fatah, and the cadres of the interior who had come out of the first Intifada - whom, however, he had constantly marginalized during the Oslo years. He helped considerably to create and develop "the" armed wing of Fatah, the Al-Aqsa Brigades. The leadership of the PA sapped any attempt at self-organization of the movement, encouraging its militarization in order not to lose ground to Hamas and to de-popularize the uprising, and proclaimed himself natural leader of the uprising while offering it the

perspective of new negotiations.

This policy failed. The violence of Israeli repression and the political line of Barak, then of Sharon, in particular after September 11, was aimed not only at breaking the uprising but also at dismantling the structures put in place by Arafat, in particular the security forces which sometimes turned their weapons against Israel. This led to the reoccupation of the autonomous zones (October 2001) and the massive onslaught of March-April 2002, combined with the putting into quarantine of Arafat, declared to be undesirable. Cracks appeared in the leadership of the PA. Some, like Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) and Nabil Amr, openly condemned the uprising and the return to the armed struggle.

Pressures were exerted on Arafat to reform the PA and agree to share power with them. A post of Prime Minister was created in 2003 (for Abbas), but Arafat refused to give up the control of the security services and the rupture was consummated. During these years, the struggle was more and more taken in hand by Hamas, Jihad and the PFLP, while Fatah was imploding: the depoliticization that had been orchestrated by the PA in the 1990s and the promotion of local potentates who had their own clientele networks largely contributed to the autonomisation of notables of Fatah, to an exacerbation of the competition between them and to a decomposition and autonomisation of the armed groups linked to Fatah (in particular the Al-Aqsa Brigades).

The Palestinian Left, and in particular the PFLP, which took part with the means that it had in the armed resistance and whose network of associations demonstrated its utility during a period of generalized impoverishment and dismantling of the meagre infrastructures of the PA, won back a small part of its base. The PFLP undertook a critical examination of the ten years which had elapsed since Oslo and tried to bring its orientation up to date, including in terms of international links. Mustapha Barghouthi did the same, more for reasons of politicking and opportunism than from conviction.

The death of Arafat and the advent of Abu Mazen and Fayyad

The physical death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 represented an important moment. He was the only one capable of ensuring a pretence of unity in Fatah and in the PA, the only one to incarnate past resistance and the "peace" process. Abu Mazen took over the succession and was "badly elected" in January 2005 (with a low level of participation and especially with 20 per cent of the votes going to Barghouthi, whose candidature was supported by, among others, the PFLP). He carried out a series of reforms in the PA and reorganized the security services, trying to change some of those who were in charge of them.

During the year 2005, municipal elections were organized in the big cities, almost all won by Hamas, with for the first time, on the part of the PFLP, the choice of allying with the Islamic organization in several municipalities (in particular Bethlehem). Israel and the United States forced Abbas to organize legislative elections in January 2006. Hamas and Fatah were neck and neck for the list seats at national level, but on the level of the districts (half of the seats), the defeat of Fatah was unequivocal: the candidates who were associated with the PA (former ministers or high ranking officials) were swept away. The PFLP won 4 per cent of the vote, Mustapha Barghouthi 2.5 per cent.

After the failed putsch of June 2007, Abu Mazen declared a state of emergency and appointed (on the recommendations of the United States and the EU) Salam Fayyad to the post of Prime Minister. The new government of the PA was a government of economists, technocrats, and the tandem Abu Mazen-Fayyad laid down three major goals: to normalise economic relations with Israel, to rebuild and reform the security services and to dismantle resistance.

The reorganization of the security services was significant of the changes underway with Fayyad and Abu Mazen: recruitment no longer took place on a partisan basis (contrary to what occurred after Oslo, it was better to avoid being in Fatah or to have a past as a combatant), training of new recruits was officially under US supervision (by General Dayton), those in charge of the principal services were replaced by individuals considered close to the United States (such as Hazem Atallah, appointed to be in charge of the police force in the West Bank, in place of Kamal Sheikh, a member of Fatah but considered to be too conciliatory with regard to Hamas)...

There followed a series of operations aimed at "restoring order", in Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, with hundreds of arrests, serious incidents (deaths, wounded) and the dismantling of the whole of the armed groups. At the time of the events of Gaza, this police force was used to repress demonstrations in the West Bank, to prevent them from going towards Israeli objectives and to arrest dozens of demonstrators, in particular militants of the Left and of Hamas.

Conclusion

If the Arafat team was able to get the Oslo Agreements accepted "ideologically", the Abu Mazen-Fayyad team is probably the one that some people, in Israel and in the United States, are counting on to get them accepted definitively, by using the (economic) carrot and the stick.

The last twenty years have completed the process of transformation of the leadership of the PLO from a state apparatus without a state into an element that is integrated into the system of Israeli colonial administration. The PLO, emptied of its prerogatives and of its legitimacy, has paid the price for this; Fatah, which has completely imploded, has paid the price for it. Abu Mazen does not incarnate a "strategy" of the national movement, but the most barefaced collaboration, which does not go uncriticised within the (plural) Fatah.

The Left has been considerably marked by the 20 last years. The PPP is very much weakened. It has lost credibility and many of its militants are demanding a critical balance sheet of the Oslo years, and even more than that. The DFLP has become a small group in the Palestinian territories, decimated by the split of Yasser Abed Rabbo at the time of Oslo and the foundation of the FIDA (Palestine Democratic Union). Mustapha Barghouthi, the incarnation of the NGOisation of Palestinian political life and of political opportunism, has more credibility and more of an audience in the solidarity movement than he has in Palestine.

There remains the PFLP. The leadership of the party has been considerably weakened (half of the

cadres are in prison). The PFLP is also marked by localisms, but the organization has succeeded in maintaining itself, and even in finding a second wind. Many of its militants have a real legitimacy, their "left" criticisms of the PA have a relative audience, and the organization, open to the outside world and aware of the changes that are taking place on an international scale, in particular of the political recompositions that are taking place in the radical Left and in the countries of Latin America.

The PFLP seems nevertheless to lack a strategic vision in the medium and long term: with Barghouthi in 2005, then with Hamas in the local elections, then on its own in the legislative elections, while remaining in the PLO; with Hamas in the West Bank (demonstrations, student elections), in

permanent confrontation with Hamas in Gaza. Since the elections of 2006, the PFLP has primarily tried to play the role of unifier between Hamas and Fatah, without necessarily developing a strategy for building a credible political alternative.

Their recent declarations, following Gaza, put the accent on unity "in resistance". Some leaders of the PFLP also take part in discussions on the reorganization of the PLO, with the possible integration of Hamas, which would indicate an important evolution. Moreover, Fatah has in its ranks many critical elements which could also take part in processes of recomposition of the Palestinian resistance and of the PLO, also involving members of the Islamic factions, and even the Palestinians of 1948.

The impact of the Zionist project on Palestine and the region

30 January 2010, by **Roland Rance**

This Plan B proposed the establishment of something that could be presented as a Palestinian state - alongside the state of Israel. We know that it would have been nothing of the sort: the proposed Palestinian state would have had NO control of its own borders or airspace, NO armed forces, been unable to absorb the Palestinian refugees, and crucially, have had NO control of its water resources. But this Plan B has been the position of the imperialists, supported verbally by most Arab regimes and the Israeli government for the last several years.

Now this approach has collapsed and it appears that imperialism has no fall-back plan, instead reverting to a revised version of Plan A which gives Israel carte blanche in the region.

Background and Perspectives

In the past, imperialism - in its own interests - divided the Arab world into separate states with no material historical, geographical, economic or social basis. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire during World War I, Britain and France rushed to stake their claims in the Middle East. Having encouraged nationalist risings against the Turks, they then made it clear that they had no intention of honouring their promises, or even of observing US President Wilson's famous "Nineteen Principles". Thus imperialism chose to dissociate the peoples of the region from its natural resources, and has fostered the development of local military or feudal leaderships with no local legitimacy and no reason to act in the interests of their subjects.

Some of these states were established in order to limit the independence of potentially powerful neighbours. Thus Kuwait was established in order to deny sea access to Iraq, a country with vast oil reserves. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia was ringed by a chain of feudal monarchies with strong defence ties with Britain. Others, notably Lebanon, were established on a spurious religio-ethnic basis, in order to deepen the confessionalism of the Middle East and undermine the appeal of Arab unity.

There can be no solution for the problems of the Arab world, including the many national minorities, in the framework of this division. The exploitation of the resources of the region for the benefit of the peoples of the region and the free development of the national minorities can only be achieved within the context of a united Middle East. This, and not any romantic support for the ideas of Arab

nationalism, is why we call for the establishment of a socialist federation of the Middle East. This is not an abstract demand, but the necessary condition for the liberation of the peoples of the region, including the national minorities.

Role of Zionism and the state of Israel

Within this division of the Middle East, the state of Israel and the Zionist movement have played a key role. They have been the cutting edge of imperialist domination in the region. Unlike other regimes in the region, Israel has no option than a strategic alliance with imperialism.

This strategic imperative was recognised by both parties. Theodor Herzl, the founder of the organised Zionist movement, wrote in 1895 of forming in Palestine “a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism”, while the British Military Governor of Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs, noted in 1917 that the Zionists would form for England “a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism”.

Israel has introduced a complicating factor into the Middle East patchwork. Not only has Israel been the unshakeable ally of imperialism, it is potential threat to any radical or popular regime in the area. The very existence of Israel, as a Jewish state, its dispossession of the Palestinians, and its aggression against other states has contributed towards diverting the resources of the region and distorting the economic and social development of the Middle East. However, the actions of the state of Israel have assisted in the formation of a cross-class “national purpose” in the Arab states, and have encouraged (sometimes deliberately) the growth of the forces of political Islam.

Liberation in the Middle East thus requires the integration of Israeli Jews into the Arab world. Any approach based on the recognition and legitimisation of Zionist separatism

means a continuation of the present tendency towards ever-more-explicit apartheid. This integration will not be easy, and we need to pose a strategy for realising this.

Reality of Zionism

Zionism is not just a word, and it is more than an ideology. It is a very real, organised political movement with a tangible impact on developments and everyday reality in the Middle East. In one significant way, as I shall explain later, it means that Israel is a state unlike any other.

From the start, the Zionist movement set itself three tasks: the colonisation of Palestine, the recruitment of Jews to support this, and the attraction of an imperialist sponsor. It has been remarkably successful in all three of these.

Zionism arose as a flawed response to European anti-Semitism, which it viewed as a rational and legitimate reaction to what it viewed as the anomalous existence of Jews in Europe. Zionists concluded from this that an anti-racist struggle was futile, and that the only possible response was that Jews should remove themselves from European society and establish their own state in Palestine. In this, ironically, they found that their strongest allies were precisely those racists who shared their goal of ridding Europe of its Jews.

A striking example of this was the British Conservative politician Arthur Balfour, who gave his name to the notorious Balfour Declaration of 1917, in which the British government stated its support for the establishment of a Jewish “national home” in Palestine. This was not through love of Jews; some years earlier, the same Balfour had introduced the first Aliens Act in Britain, designed to prevent the immigration of Jews fleeing pogroms and Tsarist oppression. Balfour’s speech in the House of Commons dripped with contempt for the “unassimilable” Jews, with their own language, religion, and suspicious links to foreign terrorists.

At first, the Zionist movement

attracted little response. In the period between 1881 and 1914, some 2 million Jews fled the Russian Empire. Of these, only some 50,000 went to Palestine and half of these left within five years. In fact, mass Jewish support for Zionism followed, rather than led to, the establishment of the state of Israel.

The Zionists expressed their policy of colonisation of Palestine in the phrases “conquest of the land” and “conquest of labour” - ie, expropriation and dispossession of the Palestinians and their exclusion from the economy. Before 1948, this was carried out on a small scale, largely through land purchase from absentee landlords. In sharp contrast with traditional patterns of ownership, however, the Zionists did not buy the land in order to use the tenant farmers already working the land, but rather to replace them. Hence, there are reports of evictions and clashes dating back to the beginning of the 20th century.

With the creation of the state of Israel...

Since the mass expulsion of Palestinians and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, this process has accelerated massively. Hundreds of Palestinian villages were depopulated, and their lands taken over. These lands have been administered by the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish National Fund, which since 1952 have officially shared power with the Israeli government.

These bodies, which are not answerable, even in theory, to the people of Israel - nor even to the Jews of Israel - but to the legal fiction of “the Jewish people”, manage nearly all land and determine land use policy in Israel and in much of the land occupied in 1967. In effect, a major element of state power has been extra-territorialised by official legislation. Since these Zionist organisations are statutorily obliged to work for the benefit of Jews alone, this means that use of over 90% of the land in Israel is

denied to non-Jews.

Additionally, the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish National Fund take responsibility for much of the social service provision in Israel, including education, welfare and infrastructure. Thus, structural discrimination can be maintained, without the need for any explicit racist legislation.

But these Zionist bodies are also registered charities in many western states, which are thus subsidising this discrimination. Belatedly, the solidarity movement is realising the necessity of challenging this.

The Current Role of Zionism in Imperialist Strategy in the Middle East

This is the context in which Zionism fits into the imperialist strategy of dividing the Middle East. The alliance between Israel and imperialism is not accidental, and nor is it a result of the power of any "Zionist (or Jewish) lobby". In fact, as has been clearly demonstrated by US political scientist Abramo Organski, the growth of this lobby followed, rather than led to, massive increases in US political, military and financial aid to Israel. In fact, the lobby is more a function of US foreign policy, than an influence on it.

Because the Zionist project is not synonymous with the imperialist project, there have at times been differences and tensions. Given the results of the recent US and Israeli elections, it is likely that we will see such tensions in the coming period, and we must be ready to respond appropriately.

The US is still, formally at least, committed to its Plan B; indeed, Obama probably supports this with

greater enthusiasm than Bush ever did. But any new Israeli government, under the likely leadership of Netanyahu, will be well to the right of the former Olmert line. Even if the ultra-nationalist Lieberman is excluded, such a new government would be likely to resist even minimal concessions. So we can expect US pressure on Israel to focus on a two-state settlement.

Problems of the Two-State Solution

But we must recognise that any international pressure for such a settlement can never resolve the conflict.

Can the rights of both Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews be ensured, and can we move towards a revolutionary transformation in the Middle East, through the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel? Many on the left argue that this is possible, indeed necessary. Citing the decades of conflict, the history of European racism and the Nazi holocaust, they argue that Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs are incapable of living in a common state. They therefore support the demand of the PLO leadership, and of parts of the Israeli peace movement, for the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel. Some go even further, adopting the explicitly apartheid slogan of "Two states for two peoples" - the logic of which implies the removal of Palestinians from the Jewish state, and of Jews from the Palestinian state.

Against this, we argue that a further partition would perpetuate the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, would reinforce the national consensus of both communities, and would undermine the possibility of any development of class unity. We recognise that the continued existence of Israel as a Jewish state will necessarily act against a revolutionary transformation of the region, yet there

is no logic for Israel's existence in any other form.

A two-state approach, even in its most generous application, with a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, would still leave unresolved key questions. Without recognising the right of return for the millions of Palestinian refugees and establishing mechanisms for this to take place, there is no chance of a lasting solution. Clearly there is no possibility of their large-scale resettlement in the relatively arid and unfertile West Bank.

Other issues, too - in particular, the use of scarce water resources - could only be addressed on a Palestine-wide, if not regional, basis. Additionally, any demand for the removal of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories would be met by an Israeli demand for "transfer" - the expulsion of Palestinian citizens from the state of Israel. Indeed, this seems to be the logic of the "Two states for two peoples" demand.

Strategy for the Palestine solidarity movement

Analytically, this means that our position, our propaganda, should emphasise the centrality of the Zionist project, and the key role of Zionism, in alliance with imperialism, in subjugating and dividing the people of Palestine and of the Middle East.

Practically, in terms of our involvement in the solidarity movement, this also has serious implications. In particular, while working to develop the international campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions and to expose Israeli war crimes, we must work to ensure that the solidarity movements establish direct links with Palestinian and other activists, and we should strive to make this, rather than lobbying legislators, our primary focus.

The imperialist strategy of the US in the Middle East

30 January 2010, by **Salah Jaber**

The starting point in discussing US strategy in this part of the world is defining and then recognising the motives - what is it that drives the US in their intervention in the region?

The main motive for the US intervention in this area of the world, and this largely goes back to the post First World War period, is of course the question of oil. The US interest in this part of the world stems from its extraordinary wealth in oil resources. I will not amplify this point, you know the figures, I wish simply to stress that the question of oil cannot be reduced to an economic question - we are not here talking about "vulgar economism".

The question of oil certainly includes an economic dimension, a dimension that some tend to underestimate through rejection of "vulgar economism". In fact, the economic dimension is very important; it is enough to see the placing of the big US oil companies in the list of big US firms in general. They appear regularly at the head of the list in recent decades, and throughout the 20th century, and they are well anchored with the trend of oil prices.

There is then a considerable weight of oil interests in the determination of US policy. In other words, the "oil lobby", the oil companies, have a considerable weight in US foreign policy, and this is moreover nothing new. Whoever studies US foreign policy can note it. People like David Rockefeller, whose family is based on oil wealth, have played a key role in the determination of US foreign policy. Institutions as significant in this policy as the Council on Foreign Relations (which produces the review "Foreign Affairs") come from there. And throughout history, through the US presidencies since the 1920s, we

see how a good part of the determination of foreign policy, in any case so far as those regions of the world possessing oil are concerned, has been the doing of the oil companies and of their intervention with the executive in Washington.

But, and this was my point of departure, the question is not reduced solely to this economic interest, which only represents a part, certainly a central one, of US big business. Beyond this, and because of the nature of oil, there is a strategic interest which concerns US capital as a whole and thus US imperialism as a whole as determinant mechanism of policy.

The question of oil is strategic above all: you all know to what point it has become a primordial strategic commodity (and increasingly so since the First World War which accelerated the passage from coal to oil). This has led the US to accord to the Middle East a strategic importance of the first level in their global policy. The strategic value of oil made control of access to oil a major strategic asset. The question of US access to oil has become increasingly important due to the depletion of US oil reserves, and thus the growing dependence of the US in relation to oil imports. The threshold of 50% has been crossed and the US is then in a logic of growing dependency on foreign oil.

But the access enjoyed by the US itself is only one dimension of the problem and the other dimension, equally important, is control over the access of others. On the one hand control over the access to oil of allies, or "vassal" powers, imperialisms which enjoy a vassal relationship with the US. This control allows the US to increase the dependency of these powers with respect to them. On the

other hand control of the access of potential enemies, and this question has gained increasing importance in the recent historic period with the rise of China. Previously, at the time of bipolarity, the global counterweight to the US was the Soviet Union, which was itself an oil exporter and thus had no supply problems. However, the last 20 years have seen the rise of China, which depends enormously on energy imports: China has hardly any oil, above all in the light of its growing needs because of its economic growth, and this dependency can only increase the strategic value of the oil question.

To all this one can add other considerations still linked to oil: for example on the economic level. When the US imposes itself as overlord in the region, they do so in relation to their allies (Japan, extremely dependent on oil imports, still more than China or Western Europe) but also their "local protégés": the oil monarchies of the region. The most important among them being the Saudi kingdom, which alone holds a quarter of world oil reserves and thus plays a completely determinant role on the oil market. US supervision of the Saudi kingdom is a major dimension of the question, and it is also reflected by another aspect of major importance for the US for more than 30 years: these allies, these oil monarchies re-export petrodollars largely to the US, contributing thus to the financing by the rest of the world of US imperialism, the financing of the US federal budget through various mechanisms of which the purchase of treasury bonds is the most important.

It is above all this which is, from a Marxist, and indeed quite simply a realist, viewpoint, the sole explanation which stands up as to the motivation of what the US does, their interest in this part of the world. And it is here

that the debate on the question of Israel comes in.

As you probably know, there are schematically two viewpoints on the US-Israel relationship. A viewpoint which is traditionally that of the left and the anti-imperialist movement, including the Arab anti-imperialist movement, in a fairly clear manner - I refer for example to Nasser who was quite clear in this respect. This viewpoint is to consider Israel as a "guard dog" - to use a lapidary and very current formula - for the interests of US imperialism in the region. Or even the interests of imperialism in general, since at the time when this type of vision of Israel was developed, the interests that Israel served were not yet obviously those of the US, and I will return to this point. A guard dog then, as it was the founder of state Zionism himself, Theodore Herzl, had spoken of an "advance post" of what he called "civilisation" at the heart of "barbarism" in the language of colonialism. And in fact this vision of Israel as "advance post" of world imperialism is the traditional vision of the anti-imperialist movement, of left anti-imperialist nationalism, and beyond. Thus, during the 2006 war, Hezbollah general secretary Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech that for him things were clear enough: Israel worked on behalf of the US. Beyond this, there is a vast spectrum of tendencies who share this type of analysis.

And then there is another analysis that tends to present Israel as manipulating the US. Obviously, if Israel manipulates the US, a transmission belt is needed: this is "the Jews". This is a vision which places Israel at the centre and imputes to it the regional policy of the US, with fairly obvious anti-Semitic overtones. On this type of position, you have all of the reactionary regimes, monarchies or others, of the region, and in particular those who depend the most on the US, as well as the ideologies of the fundamentalist type, the Pan-Islamisms of the fundamentalist type informed by an anti-Semitic world vision. The central goal, in the case of the reactionary regimes, is to explain that if the US supports Israel it is not because it is

an imperialist power, but because of the weight and the role of the Jews, and the possibility of Israel using this "Jewish lobby" as they call it. With as political consequence the idea that the Arabs should counteract this by courting Washington to try to change the policy of the US in a direction more favourable to Arab interests. The political function of this type of vision is fairly obvious.

We have seen a similar debate develop in the West, and in the US itself. With the same type of cleavage: traditionally the left, the anti-imperialists, in the US see Israel, first and foremost, as an instrument of their own imperialism, an instrument used by the élite of US power, big business, to serve its interests. One could go further and explain to what point this instrument is extremely effective for the US. We know that Israel is the main recipient of US foreign aid, but the three billion dollars that the US gives to Israel annually is a drop in the ocean in relation to the US military budget, whereas the return from this finance is incomparably more important than the marginal yield of three more billions added to this budget. Three billion more or less would change nothing at all in the military performance of the US; on the contrary, the role that Israel plays as an allied military force is absolutely fundamental.

We have recently seen a debate on the question of the "Israeli lobby". This time the two professors who have launched this debate are in no way anti-Semites. There certainly is a pro-Israeli lobby, and this isn't an anti-Semitic fantasy. There is a very official existence - in a country characterised by the lobbying system - and it is not exclusively Jewish: we have even seen in recent years the rise of "Christian Zionism", in the form of extremist Protestant Christians who for ideologically extravagant reasons are fervent supporters of Israel and Israeli extremism (there has even been an evangelical preacher who has said that Sharon's coma was a punishment from God because he had ordered the withdrawal from Gaza). In the view of Mearsheimer and Walt, the pro-Israel lobby would have too great a weight, too significant in US policy: this is the

problem, and that would explain why the US does things which are not in their national interest. Of course this notion of "national interest" is specific to this type of "realist" political vision and it is not a notion that we share. The two professors in question form part of the US establishment and belong to the "realist" current, and they constructed their argument at a time when the US quagmire in Iraq had become patent, claiming that it was Israel's fault that the US had invaded Iraq, when this was not in its national interest.

That has been broadly contested, including on the factual front: we now know that Israel asked, before the invasion of Iraq, that the US confront Iran instead, since that was the main enemy while Iraq was in no position to cause trouble (except for those who could seriously believe that it possessed weapons of mass destruction, but Israel was not among them). On the contrary, Iran is considered as the main enemy of Israel, and remains the priority from the Israeli viewpoint. And there we can see the limits of the coincidence, of the competition between the interests of the US for which Iraq is a major objective for the reasons that I have explained, and those of Israel which has its own strategic considerations. Behind the vision of the excessive weight of the "Israeli lobby" there is a vision of US policy: US democracy is seen as the result of a competition of multiple lobbies, a kind of free market. There is here a complete myth of US policy and US democracy, in which this vision inserts itself, whereas the vision of the left is centred on the elite of power, the possessing class and the weight of big business in US foreign policy.

If we observe historic developments, it is obvious enough that history illustrates one thesis well and contradicts the other. Consider the intervention of the US in the region. Well before the birth of Israel the Saudi kingdom had become the main regional ally of the US: this importance accorded to the Saudi kingdom was reflected in the meeting between Roosevelt and the Saudi king in 1944, and by the construction at the heart of the Saudi oil-producing region (of course), of what was one of the

main US military bases outside the country after the Second World War. The US, like the Soviet Union and all of the world powers, supported the creation of the state of Israel in 1947, but in terms of real and concrete support to the Zionist movement, the Soviet Union played a much greater role than the US, in relation to arms deliveries in particular. I speak of the US as a government, not of the US Zionist organisations which gave financial support. After the war of 1948, the US decreed an arms embargo on weapons deliveries to the belligerents for several years. Thus Israel's sophisticated weaponry was supplied by France (aviation and so on.). We know moreover that Israel's access to nuclear weaponry was thanks to France. So it was French imperialism that had the closest relations with Israel. British imperialism less so, given the past history between London and the Zionist movement. And when in 1956 the tripartite Franco-British-Israeli aggression against Egypt came, following the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, it was alongside these two imperialisms that Israel intervened, while the US on the contrary condemned the aggression and even addressed an ultimatum to the three countries to stop fighting and withdraw their troops.

We see then that the idea of an Israel which manipulates the US does not fit in with the facts. From the early 1960s there was a significant change in the region: the rise of Arab nationalism, and the almost absolute "divorce", from the end of the 1950s, between this nationalism and the US after a period of hesitation. During the first years of Nasser's accession to power, the US could be perceived as a non-colonial power, a country which respected the independence of nations, but this perception quickly faded. The rise of Arab nationalism forced the US to withdraw from their Saudi base in 1962. At the same time the rise of Soviet influence in the region from 1955, with the beginning of arms deliveries and the fairly close relation that developed between Nasser's Egypt and Moscow, considerably strengthened Israel's value as a US ally in the region. It was, then, from the 1960s that Israel became in the US view a major

strategic asset. From 1966, the US began deliveries of sophisticated weaponry to Israel, and the 1967 war (Tom Segev's recent book shows it well) was the first war in which Israel directly served US interests as well as its own. And with the success that we are aware of. Which meant that after 1967, Israel became a highly appreciated US ally. We know that this 1967 war led, quite rapidly, to a radical change in the region: the marginalisation of Soviet influence, Egypt's shift out of the Soviet sphere towards the US under Sadat and so on. However, the US remained confined outside the region. In 1979, the Iranian revolution appeared as an unprecedented threat to the oil zone, and for the US, reeling from the "Vietnam syndrome" since the withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973, the importance of Israel could only grow. To obtain a green light from Congress for military intervention the US executive often needed a lot of time, whereas Israel was an advance post, capable of intervening any time.

This situation continued until 1990, the year of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, the year of the return - much more strongly than before - of the US in the region, notably on Saudi territory. With this return, Israel's strategic value for the US diminished. And this was apparent immediately, from 1990-91 with the injunction given to Israel not to respond to the firing of Iraqi Scud missiles at its territory, because that would hinder the US, and up to the struggle between Washington and the Shamir government to force the latter to participate in the Madrid conference in autumn 1991 and the beginning of the "peace process". The US had acquired an unprecedented hegemony in the region and then posed the objective of stabilising it; that necessarily meant a settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. We know what followed: Oslo, then a stalemate of the process accompanied by the rise of Iran. With the end of the Iraq-Iran war and the embargo imposed on Iraq after 1991, the fact that the mutual neutralisation between Iraq and Iran ceased, and given the state that Iraq was in, the field was left free for Iran. That revived the interest in Israel as an ally, all the more given the rise of Al-Qaida from the 1990s onwards, the

pressure on the Saudi regime to again obtain the withdrawal of US troops from its territory - because of the flagrant contradiction with Wahabi ideology created by the presence of non-Muslim troops in the country of Islam's holy places - became ever stronger. All this re-established the importance of Israel, which would again grow after September 11, 2001 and the beginning of the US military intervention on a regional scale in 2003. The effort that this represented for the US above all from the viewpoint of personnel, then their quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, made them appear as incapable of acting in case of the opening of a third front. To summarise, there is a fluctuation in the value of Israel, not in the strategic sense - strategically Israel remains an essential asset - but in the sense that, at times, it is the indispensable ally to be cherished, whereas at other times, the US is in a position where it can exert pressure on Israel, as in 1991.

The question posed today is the following: are we again, after the green light the Bush administration gave Israel in recent years, in a period where we will see tensions surge between the US and Israel under the new Obama administration?

It's possible. I don't say that it's probable, but only possible. Moreover there is a kind of distance which is being established between an administration which witnesses to a return of the pendulum, limited as it is, in relation to the Bush administration - but this is easy, given that the Bush administration was the most reactionary in US history - and at the same time the ongoing slide to the right in Israel, producing an ever more right wing political landscape. That began progressively 30 years ago and is going from bad to worse. There is then a distance, to which we can add the statements of the new US administration desirous of resuming dialogue with Iran, conscious of the terrible damage done to the interests of US imperialism by the Bush administration and the disastrous fashion in which it has managed all this, and wishing to rectify the situation. That could cause tensions between the Israeli government and the US. But what will remain

determinant is the US military position in the region and so long as it remains bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan; their margin of pressure on Israel will be minimal.

However, and here I conclude, I believe that there is no need to explain here what tensions could emerge, even if they were comparable to the relatively strong tensions of 1990-91, we are not in the presence of a US which would seek to impose on Israel

a "solution" acceptable to the Arab side/ There is simply the will to obtain more moderation and cooperation from Israel, but still with the objective of facilitating the essential task of the US in the region, namely the control of the region, which involves a cleavage between the allies of the US who it is necessary to strengthen - hence the problem with Israel which weakens them, it is enough to think of Mahmoud Abbas, extremely weakened by the Israeli attitude - and the

enemies of the US, who must be crushed or bought off. There could then be tensions, but enemies will remain enemies and US support for Israel in that combat will not change. On the other hand, we could see pressures in the direction of a more conciliatory Israeli attitude faced with the concerted initiative of the Arab regimes, and we see moreover at this time a Saudi media offensive to request that the new administration change course.

Report on new unions in Palestine

30 January 2010, by **Tony Richardson**

On that occasion I started a link-up with the Ramallah branch of the PGFTU. They had recently had a huge increase in membership, because food parcels, money, and health coverage, paid for by money from Arab countries, was distributed through the PGFTU. Arafat wanted to use this Fateh controlled organisation.

The Secretary in Ramallah was in favour of membership elections in the union. In 2004 the unions Conference adopted this policy. This has never been carried out, and they have continued with the policy of distributing seats to the political organisations, mainly Fateh.

I held workshops in Ramallah on union democracy. A woman activist from Unison also held a workshop on democracy for women. These were for FIDE (Baathist) Party members of the PGFTU. I dealt with Workers Councils, and other forms of democracy, and the two day school was very successful.

The Ramallah Secretary, and member of the 8 person Executive, continued to argue for the implementation of the election resolution, and to clash with national secretary Shaheer Sahid. He was subsequently sacked from his union job, and expelled from the union.

In the meantime there was the development of the New Unions.

These were sponsored by the Democracy and Workers Rights Centre(DWRC).

They had started off helping workers with legal cases against Israeli employers. They then had helped workers, in Palestine, with there employers, and out of that Committees were formed in workplaces.

These committees then started linking together to form industrial unions, in Health, Banks etc.

At this time I met several of these Committees, and talked to many of them over the period of their formation.

There were a small number of independent unions already in existence, for example the University Lecturers and Workers, and the Teachers Union.

The biggest problem for workers in Palestine was that the existing Union Federations, including the PGFTU, did nothing. They were controlled by Fateh and were therefore adjuncts of the Govt.

The new Unions had a short period of strength in Gaza, but with the destruction of the industry there, they were greatly weakened.

The sacked PGFTU Secretary joined

the Unemployed Workers Union, which is big, particularly in Hebron.

Many strikes were organised by the new Independent Democratic Unions, which because they were not controlled by a particular part, could fight against the Govt.

These strikes increased with the election of the Hamas Govt., because the EU boycott meant there was little money for teachers etc.. There was a long Hospital strike, over non-payment of wages.

There were many other problems for the workers, for example Bank workers, as were many others, paid in Jordanian Dinars, which has weakened against the Shekel. But they have to pay their bills in Shekels. The rising cost of living, and other problems, such as periods lost at checkpoints, have all set off struggles.

These new unions came together on 2007, to form a Federation of Independent Democratic Unions. I spoke at the Federations founding conference, in Ramallah.

Even after Hamas was removed from the west bank Govt. the struggles continued. Last year there was a huge teachers strike, I spoke at their main rally, but what was of interest was that so did all the leaders of the political parties in the Palestinian

Legislative Council, including Fateh. This despite the fact that Abbas's Minister of education had called the strike illegal.

This tends to show how little support his undemocratic Govt. has.

So we have to decide our attitude to these new unions.

In their favour is that they are the only people leading strikes, they hold elections at least every 2 years, they

contain members of all political parties, but are not controlled by one. They are mainly in the professions, but they contain the Unemployed Union, and the lowest paid of the hospital workers etc.

Problems are that they were mainly formed with the help of an NGO. But the main problem for us in relation to linking, plus solidarity work, is that they are not part of an International Federation, so the TUC, CGT etc. will have nothing to do with them.

But the fact that the PGFTU does nothing, gives us no choice.

We should still retain relations with PGFTU, because changed circumstances might create changes in them.

In the international Solidarity movement the election has forced organisations to not just do everything Fateh says, so is the case with the Trade Unions.

Perspectives for Palestine

30 January 2010, by **Salah Jaber**

If we start out with solutions for settlements, proposed in just after the Second World War, between 1945 and 1948, on the Arab side there were two basic positions:

1) One that was the position of the League of Arab States, which at the time was essentially led by Wafdist Egypt; that is by a liberal nationalist current which intersected with the positions of the left to be found in the region, and particularly in Palestine, including among Jewish and Arab communist activists. This perspective was what we would now call a binational solution, in the sense that in both cases what was contemplated was a State made up of the current inhabitants of Palestine, thus non-exclusive. The proposal formulated by the Arab States for parliamentary representation, with one third of seats guaranteed to the Jewish population, reflecting their proportion among the population of Palestine at the time. This means overall, a formula for a democratic state, but also taking into account the difference between the two national communities; although of course the Jewish-Israeli community was a nation in formation, if we can put it that way.

2) Faced with this perspective, there was the outlook represented by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini, which is an outlook described as

ultranationalist, which consisted of demanding the departure of all Jews who arrived in Palestine after 1917.

So there was a split going back to that era between two types of positions.

In the later course of events, we can see the dominant political current from the mid-1950s and 1960s of which Nasser was the foremost representative. From the outset, the Nasserist outlook, contrary to the myths surrounding the June 1967 war, took a stand in against the idea of "throwing the Jews in the sea". Nasser made statements against such ideas straight away, and supported a position that was more or less in the footsteps of the League of Arab States position, supporting a State of Palestine, a Palestine in which the Jews present could live with their full rights as a minority, a justifiable term if we look at Palestine within the mandate borders, as there were more Palestinians than Israeli Jews.

The PLO, founded in 1964 in Jerusalem under the aegis of the Arab regimes and in particular of Arab reaction (and contrary to what is believed, Choukeiry was not a close friend of the Nasser regime, with which he had had many conflicts) was rather, in its founding charter, in the continuity of the Mufti's ultranationalist vision, with a

definition of the Jews entitled to remain in Palestine as Palestinian Jews, i.e. the native Jews. Even when the charter was amended in 1968, the formula retained spoke of the Jews entitled to remain in Palestine as those who had been present in Palestine before 1917, according to the mufti's ultranationalist formula. This implied that all those who arrived later had to pack their bags and return to their countries of origin, patterned after the exodus of Europeans in Algeria after national independence.

When Palestinian guerrilla movements developed after 1967, and started to progressively take control of the PLO, they formulated another approach, which however could never be inscribed in the PLO charter, due to resistance of ultranationalists, present in PLO institutions, in particular in PNC, (the Palestinian National Council).

As for Fatah, a certain number of leaders and intellectuals linked to the movement developed the idea, which actually converged with the other outlook and is not really new, of a democratic Palestine, a democratic State in Palestine, to cite the precise formulation, which would include all Palestinians, including returning refugees, and Jewish inhabitants of the land, not without ambiguities at

times, for example such as the allusion to political conditions that would determine who would have the right to remain in democratic Palestine. The fundamental idea is to speak of a State where Palestinian Arabs and Jewish immigrants to Palestine would coexist.

This perspective was also formulated by the Popular Front, which developed the same idea: of a democratic State of Palestine, with a clearer stance on its openness to all its inhabitants, though ambiguities remain.

This democratic State perspective has faced much criticism from the start; there was even criticism from an Arab nationalist standpoint, of the fact that such a perspective enclosed the Palestinian question within the borders of the British mandate, just as questionable from an Arab nationalist viewpoint as all the other Arab borders. The fundamental criticism of this type of approach is: that it views the Israelis as Jews. In other terms, it sees the Israeli question as a religious community question, and fails to take into account the existence of the historical formation of an Israeli national fact. Thus, the solution to the conflict can't be reduced to a democratic, secular State, as if it were just a question of coexistence of religious communities, while ignoring the unavoidable national dimension.

Obviously, the second criticism of such a formulation from a Marxist viewpoint is its limitation to a "democratic" perspective, i.e. a bourgeois programme: it is the idea that there can be a substantial solution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem solution within a capitalist, bourgeois democratic framework.

Faced with this type of formulation we can find, as early as 1970 in Palestinian circles, a perspective that can be seen as the most advanced of the era, formulated by the Democratic Front, which was originally a split from the Popular Front, a combination of activists from the Popular Front, itself from the Arab nationalist movement, but also a very important contribution from left communists fleeing the bloody repression launched after the 1968 Ba'athist coup. Among these, there were people with Trotskyist sympathies, which can be

seen by the references to Trotsky in the earliest Democratic Front documents, combined with references to Mao Tse-Tung.

Nayef Hawatmeh, the main leader of the Democratic Front then advocated a binational socialist solution, with Yugoslavia as a model. Of course nowadays, in light of what has become of Yugoslavia, this is as bad as Arafat's frequent reference to Lebanon as a model for Secular Democratic Palestine, (apart from the fact that Lebanese secularism is entirely questionable, to say the least). Of course, references must be viewed in the context of the times. What is essential in the Democratic Front outlook is the idea of a federative solution taking into account national entities that could only be achieved in a socialist perspective.

On the Israeli side, in the 1960s the Israeli Socialist Organisation was formed, better known as Matzpen, which at the outset also subscribed to the Marxist perspective of a fundamental solution to the problem in a socialist framework, and spoke of a Middle Eastern socialist federation. Leaving out the term "Arab" reflected their desire to include a State of Israel in this federation. ISO put Palestinian self-determination and self-determination of the Israeli nation, as they put it, on the same plane.

We had a disagreement with such a perspective, because it is not possible to put the right to self-determination of a nation that is not only self-determining but is also determining the fate of others, in other terms and oppressor nation, on the same plan as that of an oppressed people.

The perspective we developed when we began to have an organised existence in the region from 1970 was a programmatic perspective taking into account both the criticisms I have mentioned but also a criticism of any vision of liberation of Palestine resulting only from a struggle waged from outside (which was the overall prevailing outlook at the period in the Arab world, in PLO, in Fatah. Only DFLP had a somewhat different outlook that took into account the necessary Judeo-Israeli component in the struggle).

So it is the idea that no Palestine liberation is possible in the form of a military liberation from outside, for a series of reasons I don't think I have to elaborate and which concern the nature of the Israeli state. Israel isn't a colonial minority's state, it is a settlement colonialism based on expulsion of the indigenous population, and an over-armed State, including nuclear weapons, meaning that a strictly military perspective leads to an apocalyptic vision. It is a perspective that must also be ruled out from an internationalist outlook, obviously, if we think there are no real solutions to the question except in a socialist framework, we have a class outlook: if we think that there is no real solution to the question outside a socialist framework, we think of a class perspective. And a class outlook is transversal, horizontal, not only incorporating national divisions in pure form, but also in combination with social and class divisions. Whence the revolutionary programmatic perspective with a utopian dimension we stood for (and such a dimension is needed, to advance reflection, debate and education). Our perspective combined a revolution on an Arab regional level (insisting on the fact that Palestinians must take part in class struggles wherever they lived, counter to Fatah's outlook of Palestinian "non-interference" in Arab state affairs. We emphasized that the overthrow of the Arab regimes is an essential condition for the victory of the Palestinian struggle. Moreover we considered that the progress of the revolutionary movement on a regional scale had to create conditions for the emergence of a partner in Israel. In other words, the rise of a movement with an internationalist programme on the Arab side would create conditions favourable for the emergence of a partner on the Israeli side and thus the split needed within Israeli society. This split with Zionism and its State expression would occur on a social, class and pacifist basis. Dismantlement of the Zionist State, the dismantlement of its structures (a less frightening term than destruction) can or must be achieved through this combination.

In that context, the priority was a solution recognizing the Palestinian

people's historical rights: the right to self-determination and return. It is thus in the context of a response to these rights, that we defend the possibility of maintaining an Israeli entity, although Marxists favour the elimination of all borders, as an indispensable guarantee offered to the Judeo-Israeli, or Israeli nation, within an internationalist approach: the possibility of maintaining its existence in a state form that can be reconciled with Palestinian rights.

This was a programmatic development converging with those of other Arab Marxists at the time. There were interesting texts by Sadiq Jal' al-Azm, for example, strongly criticising a certain vision of right to return in which each person returns key and title in hand to recover the land or the dwelling where he or his ancestors lived. The author explained that "right to return" from a socialist standpoint means developing solutions not based on a private property perspective, but a substantial solution to the national question.

Thus, we combined this type of future programmatic perspectives with immediate demand for immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli army from the territories occupied in 1967. And we explained that opposing such a formula in the name of liberation of all Palestine, as Palestinian maximalism did at first, including Fatah itself - you can see the change over the years ! - was a gross error. There was the possibility of building a combined force, broad convergences on the question of the 1967 territories that had to be the object of an immediate struggle. Moreover this was an immediate need of population affected in the West Bank and Gaza. Thus we had to fight for withdrawal of the occupying army. Of course, this was not at the price of a capitulation as in the Oslo agreements, but in a total and unconditional withdrawal perspective. Of course those are struggle slogans, but I think they were correct and remain so.

Now I'll come to how the problem can be posed today.

I'll start out with the debate on "One State/Two States". Firstly, I think this

whole debate is a considerable waste of time and energy, to a great extent. Why? Reflect a bit together, on the "One-State" perspective. It is obvious that in the short term, independent of any other consideration, it is not possible. If it is a long-term solution, then we will find everything I said about the limits of the framework: Why Palestine within the borders set by the British Mandate, why not Palestine and Jordan, knowing that according to estimates approximately 60% to 80% of the Jordanian population, east of the Jordan, are Palestinians, from the region located between the Jordan and the Mediterranean.

What is more important still is that even on the Palestinian side - beyond the fact that from the Israeli side this is obviously a prospect refused - it is not at all certain that Palestinians want to live in the same State as Israelis. If we take South Africa as a model; even without taking into account the huge difference of proportions between Whites and Blacks in South Africa and Palestinians and Israelis in a state that would include both of them, how could Palestinians tolerate, after decades of such strong oppression, to live under Israeli domination, akin to white domination remaining in all fields - economic, social, etc. - with the exception of political structures, in post-apartheid South Africa? It is not a perspective that corresponds to Palestinian aspirations.

But those who now call for "One State", arguing that the "Two-State" solution is no longer possible, most often base their case on the idea that Zionist settlement in the West Bank is irreversible. Of course we can't accept such an argument because that means we would have to stop struggling for dismantlement of the settlements. If, on the other hand, their argument is that a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is not viable, that is a correct argument, but we've been saying that in the region since the 1970s. From that standpoint we could even converge with the PFLP'S historic leader Georges Habache, when he said Amman should be the Palestinians Hanoi, implying both that the monarchy must be overthrown and that there are similar

complementarities between what is called Jordan and Palestine, as between North and South Vietnam, these were both one land and the British cut in half.

But the problem becomes clearer still from the standpoint of rights and struggles, to say what Sergio had said, starting out from rights: what political translation can a state programme now have? The only political expression I can see as making sense is the Lambertists . I don't know if there are still any in Israel, but in any case in the 1970s they called for the election of a Constituent Assembly for all the territory between the Jordan and the Mediterranean: that was their watchword: voting rights for all in British Mandate borders Palestine. Yet thinking that Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza will demand voting rights in the Knesset , even if it is rebranded as the Constituent Assembly, is simply dreaming, that is not at all the context Palestinians locate themselves in.

The immediate aspirations of Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza, who are the first concerned today, the top priority - not the only one, I'll get back to that in a moment - have been expressed in well-known demands: withdrawal from the 1967 occupied territories, destruction of the wall, dismantlement of the settlements. These demands are calls for the utter reversal of the process begun in 1967. This is what Palestinians are fighting for today, and they have not reached the point of saying "We can't get rid of the occupation any more, so we'll have to demand to live in a single state alongside the Israelis", in other words call for their lands to be annexed to Israel! In any case in this entire debate, whatever the programmatic perspectives we put forward, and what we have to be clear on is the Palestinians' right to self-determination, thus it is their right to determine what they want. And the Palestinian consensus today, as expressed in the "Prisoners' document", for example, including the modified version accepted by all Palestinian organisations from Hamas to Fatah (with the sole exception of the Islamic Jihad): is this 1967 territories priority. There is a

Palestinian consensus on this that we must support: the struggle against the occupation, the against the wall, and against the settlements.

This perspective can be achieved. That does not mean it is for tomorrow. But I mean it is not to be confused with the historical conditions required to dismantle the Zionist State, which is a far more long-term perspective, which we all keenly hope for. The immediate objective on which there is the broadest Palestinian consensus can be achieved on the basis of the force of the struggle of Palestinian masses, combining their struggle with international support, and a split between hawks and doves within Israeli society. This is also why at a certain point the Palestinian leadership, the PLO leadership, understood the importance of paying attention to what is going on in Israel. For Hamas there are no such considerations, thus their suicide bombings targeting civilians, which flow from a religious vision of the conflict and everything else, and which have produced very negative results by strengthening the dialectic between Hamas and the Zionist right. Hamas' strategy runs counter to the real conditions for deepening the split within Israeli society, which is a necessary condition for Palestinians to achieve their ends.

I repeat, beyond, the question of the West Bank and Gaza cannot be dissociated from the struggle of Palestinians elsewhere, starting with Jordan. From that standpoint, the historical attitude of the PLO's Arafat leadership is frankly criminal in terms of the Palestinian people's interests. And the silence on the Jordanian question is a silence that cannot be justified by the fact that a long time ago Sharon said that Jordan was the Palestinian state and should be sufficient for the Palestinians. The fact that Sharon said that does not mean we must not aim for the overthrow of the regime in Jordan. Jordan is part of Palestine, and the Palestinian people need their Hanoi - to take up the Popular Front slogan on this point. An independent Palestinian State would not be viable unless it included Jordan as well as the West Bank and Gaza: you need merely look at a map of the region to understand that.

Beyond this, there is also the question of the Palestinians remaining in the lands seized by Israel in 1948, whose objective was formulated by Azmi Bishara, among others, as the transformation of Israel from a "Jewish" State to a "State of all its citizens". This is a way of demanding the de-Zionisation of the State of Israel, because "A State of all its citizens" means a non-Zionist state, a state not based on an ethnic definition and an ethnic Right of Return. A state for all its citizens is the antithesis of Lieberman's and Yisrael Beiteinu's logic, considering the "Jewish" nature of the State threatened by the birth rate of current Arab citizens of the State of Israel. This perspective of a "State for all its citizens" formulated by Azmi Bishara is the fairest and most central watchword for the 1948 Palestinians.

As for the rest of the Palestinian Diaspora, I'll mostly take the case of Lebanon, where there is an acute problem, because in Syria Palestinians have a much better situation than in Lebanon or even Jordan. We must struggle for equal rights for Palestinians in Lebanon. Whether they are called "Lebanese" or "Palestinian" on their papers is a secondary issue for me. But they are entitled to full citizenship rights acquired a long time ago, just as Palestinian emigrants were able to become citizens in Canada, Australia or elsewhere. There is no reason they should not have full citizenship in Lebanon where they have been living since 1948 if they were not born there. We must speak out against the hypocrisy of the Lebanese political class, from Geagea to Hezbollah, who all converge on a "no" stance on Palestinian "settlement." This is the only common denominator among all fractions of the political class in Lebanon. And behind this idea, they are transforming the Palestinian right to return into an obligation to return - that is how it is experienced in Lebanon - for example as soon as there is, for example, a Palestine-Israeli agreement with the formation of a rump State (suppose Oslo had not led to an impasse) the Palestinians would have to be sent there en masse. In terms of such an outlook, we must explain that we are utterly opposed: Palestinians who are the children of parents born in

Lebanon themselves, since we have already reached the third or fourth generation of Palestinians living in Lebanon and they certainly have the right to remain there. They certainly have the right to return to Palestine, but they must also be entitled to Lebanese citizenship. It is all the more intolerable that they are refused citizenship given that Palestinians and Lebanese are part of the same original cultural matrix while even in countries such as Australia, Canada, in Europe or elsewhere they can become citizens. Furthermore in Syria they have equal rights, while in Jordan the majority of Palestinians have citizenship... so we must fight the reigning hypocrisy in Lebanon, also shown by the fact that for example, at the time of the Lebanese army assault on the Nahr Al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in northern Lebanon, all political forces supported the assault at first, and nobody raised a finger to stop it afterwards. Hezbollah could certainly have stopped it, if only because of their weight within the army itself, but they didn't do it, although their attitude has improved. At first they actually fell in line with the general consensus. Afterwards they understood that it was an operation that could fall under enforcement of UN Security Council resolution 1559 which targets them as well, thus the definition of a "red line" not to be crossed. But the Lebanese army was able to carry out its destruction of the camp to the end, without any real impediment to this operation.

One last thing to conclude. Whatever the types of solutions put forth, if the right to self-determination means anything, it certainly means that there is no possible solution without the Palestinian people decide themselves through a referendum of Palestinians, and not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but also in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, with the participation of all Palestinian refugees. Agreements concluded with the State of Israel by an organisation such as PLO, which defines itself as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people cannot be seen as acceptable until they have been ratified by a vote of the Palestinian people. For the right to self-determination to be meaningful, we must defend the

Palestinian people's right to vote democratically on any settlement concerning them.

Beyond the interest in having

programmatic bases, our priority is not endless debates on theoretical solutions, but struggling for the most immediate needs I have referred to, as

well as for Palestinians' right to self-determination, including the right to return.

Transcription by Bernard Imahaus

Current challenges for the solidarity movement

30 January 2010, by **Cinzia Nachira**

The good news

It has been a long time in Europe since there was such a mobilisation for Palestine and above all, a mobilisation where Palestine was the sole subject of this mobilisation.

A second positive characteristic is the rapidity with which this mobilisation was set up and also its continuity. Both aspects were neither easy nor obvious, above all taking into account the fact that all the countries in Europe were involved.

Third step forwards, the systematic circulation of information, analyses and also the coordination, not always matched, of the mobilisations. In addition, the circulation of information allowed a certain breaking of the incredible network of support given to the Israeli thesis that this was a "defensive attack". Everywhere in Europe, but with some completely scandalous cases like Italy, there was a total collapse of the media, including the left media, with at least in Italy a single exception. In this situation, not only in Italy, the daily circulation of information was much more effective in relation above all to the dimensions of the mobilisations, but also their quality.

Fourth positive note: the role played by Jewish people who mobilised against this aggression. This role was important in terms of combating all those who said, and say, that Israel's policies and its colonial project represent all the world's Jews.

Another positive thing has been, and will be in future, the basis for extracting any interpretation of the conflict in Palestine from the religious cage.

The fifth plus point is that the mobilisations saw a massive presence of immigrant communities, not only Palestinians but Arabs more generally (whether originating from the Maghreb or the Mashreq). Obviously the implications of this massive mobilisation of immigrants, with all the conditions of their life in European countries and the frustrations accumulated by these communities in recent years have a direct link with the reaction to yet another massacre suffered by the Palestinian people. But this reaction is also linked to the factors which we mentioned above, to the corrupted climate of nearly unanimous support for Israel, while, beyond any political consideration, the simple number of victims on the Palestinian side and the Israeli side offered the framework of a premeditated massacre, with the goal of devastating, punishing, and terrorising.

The sixth remarkable aspect was the effort to "hear" the voices from inside Palestine/Israel arriving in Europe. Also this fact was a sort of "novelty".

Seventh positive point: obviously the broad mobilisation had positive resonations in breaking the isolation of the Palestinians, but also the small layers of Israeli Jews who mobilised inside Israel, defying the massive consensus in favour of the aggression.

Elements to think about

This mobilisation also represents a "capital" which should not be wasted and a sort of major challenge for the implications that it has in the social, cultural and political struggles which have already broken out in Europe. Either because of the global economic crisis, or because the last nine years have seen a great deal of change in the social movement.

It is not saying anything new to say that the dominant culture, above all in relation to the profound troubles which have affected the Middle Eastern left, either at the institutional level, or in terms of what is defined as "radical".

After having reached its height in 2003 with the mobilisation against the war and occupation in Iraq, the movement against the war faced the emergence of a well dispersed resistance in the Middle East characterised by the supremacy of the Islamic political formations.

I stress this element to try to understand the importance that this phenomenon has had for the social and anti-war movement in Europe.

Today we are faced with, as we have already stressed, a powerful reaction of Arab communities and also with second generation immigration, the descendants of immigrants who are born in Europe and who have not found, in their great majority,

anything other than Islamic organisations to express their aspirations for emancipation.

In addition, and this is nothing new, against the Islamophobia which has swept the West the discovery of Islam by the new generations of “European Arabs” has been, and is, a denied element of identity

It is obvious that this element is not for us a surprise or a scandal. It is a feature which, on the contrary we cannot ignore.

To give you a concrete example. On all the European mobilisations there were many religious slogans, in Italy this was also the case, which made a lot of noise, Muslims who at the big demonstration on January 3, 2009 in Milan prayed opposite the Duomo in Milan. A challenge? A danger? A simple coincidence of where the cortège had arrived at the time of prayer?

In my opinion, it wasn't planned, and of course we have defended these men and women from vulgar attacks which portrayed them all as terrorists because they dared to pray. We said very clearly that we were on their side, That was the only way of not cutting off essential links with these people, while defending the rights also of all those who don't pray, whether Arab or not.

The boycott is a struggle which unites

In this sense the battle for a general boycott against Israel is essential. Because this battle crosses all frontiers in relation to the goal. For

the boycott of Israel to become a widespread and common battle is not easy: because Israel is not perceived in the same way as South Africa at the time of generalised and declared apartheid. It is obvious that there are differences, sometimes very profound, among European countries.

It is also obvious that according to the country you put the accent on the B or D or S in BDS.

We are very involved in this battle, obviously while keeping in mind the different levels of its effectiveness. Where it is more difficult to render it widespread we should fight so that it becomes a structural basis for the more general struggle alongside the Palestinian people and also Israeli anti-colonialists.

To make it as widespread and effective as possible it is essential to involve all the trade unions who are available not only to participate but also to discuss the means of realising it. Starting from the situations where this has already happened.

In addition the fight for the boycott and also for sanctions has a unifying value with the broader social opposition, because we can put back on the agenda the fight against military expenditure and more broadly the question of NATO.

It is clear that the general attitude of European governments in approaching the global economic crisis is to cut the spending they consider “superfluous”, namely health, education, and so on, while deeming military expenditure “essential”.

Indeed, if we can render common the idea that to boycott military agreements, and not only those with Israel, is a way of solidarising with the Palestinians, but also with ourselves, and not only from an economic but

quite simply “human” viewpoint that would mean we have made a great step forward.

From this viewpoint it is essential to link the battle for the University for all, for example, with the boycott by students, but also by lecturers of any agreement with Israeli universities.

That means spreading the idea that no military research agreement is ever suitable, either from a “simply” ethical or an economic viewpoint.

In conclusion: we have to identify these points of conjuncture/interaction between the Palestinian “specificity” and the regional and broader global contexts.

If we don't do this there is the risk that the contradictions which emerge from such a complex situation will weaken solidarity because if there is no understanding of the dynamics at work there cannot be a mobilisation which is broad but also conscious that what is at stake does not concern only the peoples involved in the contingent events.

On this terrain, unhappily, in Europe the struggle of the Palestinian people is a classic case. Throughout the years when the Palestinian resistance was defined in a nationalist framework, beyond the contingent forms that it assumed, there has been the bad habit of seeking some Palestinian organisation which corresponds to our hopes and desires (definitively to console us for our own defeats) which we could “marry”. Except, if we don't find it we abandon the field, until the next massacre.

In this sense, it is essential also that we demand the right to an open discussion, always respectful and never one of substitution.