

THE DEMOCRATIC SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINE ISSUE

NABIL SHAATH*

In spite of the struggle of the Palestinian revolution and its expansion inside and outside the occupied territory, a struggle which exploded the contradictions within the Zionist entity; in spite of the rise of solidarity enjoyed by the Arab cause from countries and peoples of the socialist camp, from the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and from peace-loving people the world over; and in spite of the increase in Arab capabilities in all fields, the Zionist settler regime is still favoured by the recognition and support of wide sections of the American and European masses.

Yet, many of our friends demand that we recognize the existence of the Zionist entity as proof of our realism. We are unable to tighten the informational and political siege—let alone the military—around this enemy, nor to stamp it with racism, which it practices inside and outside occupied Palestine. The United Nations resolution which condemned Zionism as racism is still under attack by the friends of Zionism in many places.

Undoubtedly, there are many explanations for these contradictions, hidden because of the balance lacking between the forces of the Zionist structure and its allies, on the one side, and the forces of the Palestinian revolution, Arab forces and their allies, on the other. This is comparable to the balance of power in the South African continent in the shadow of the world balance of power. This imbalance of power is due to the nature of the relations between Zionism and imperialism, and to the nature of the Arab regimes, fragmented and weak.

There is a special and important reason which explains why this Zionist structure continues to receive the support of great segments of the European and American people and the hesitancy of many friendly forces in condemning the Zionist structure and its siege. The general reason is due to important characteristics of the Zionist movement, that is, in its basic *reliance upon the Jews and its tackling—erroneously of course—the solution of the Jewish problem.*

*Nabil Shaath is a prominent Palestinian intellectual. The following are excerpts from a speech delivered at the Symposium on Zionism held in Baghdad, November 8-12, 1976.

European settlers have not enjoyed the concern of anyone when the siege around their settler existence tightened, not even upon their departure from Algeria. No one was sympathetic with the Belgian colonialists who left the Congo. No demonstrations were staged anywhere expressing solidarity with the Portuguese settlers who were carried by planes and ships from the ports of liberated Angola and Mozambique. No tears are shed these days by anyone over Ian Smith and his racist regime threatened with total destruction.

The main characteristic of the Zionist movement involves the nature of Jewish history; this sect has encountered oppression, punishment and forms of social discrimination at the hands of the Europeans as no other sect has had to endure in modern times. The members of this sect have been subjected, because of their religion and ethnic origin, to atrocities, imprisonment, torture and eviction and other forms of direct and indirect discrimination. So, in spite of the fact that the Jews were the instrument used by Zionism in occupying our land, oppressing and evicting our people and committing racial crimes against our sons; in spite of the fact that the Jewish settlers, under the flag of Zionist racism, played the role of aggressor, violator and oppressor; in spite of the fact that the basic responsibility for struggling against racist Zionism falls on our shoulders, and that our military struggle remains the fundamental means and the basis for liberating our homeland from the Zionist colonialist settlers; in spite of all this, since 1968 the Palestinian revolution has proposed the framework for a secular democratic state of Arab Palestine as an important initiative for a dialogue with the Jews inside and outside of our occupied homeland, and as a political programme to solve their problem. This proposal is an intellectual framework to join with the Jews as allies for a democratic future for their welfare inside and outside Palestine, and a workable alternative to racist Zionism which has used them as an instrument in the past and continues to do so.

The Palestinian revolution offered this proposal, and continues to offer it, because it appreciates the unique problem of the Jews and the effect of this on the nature of the struggle as a whole.

This proposal of the Palestinian revolution does not aim, in offering its idea of a secular democratic state, to present a constitutional document, which precedes its implementation on the form of this state and its legal structure. Its aim was to offer an alternate philosophy and, at the same time, a better means to resolve the Jewish and Palestinian problems. The idea of a secular democratic state is a guideline for analyzing and suitably choosing among political, military and informational tactics. It should be used as a guideline for an initial dialogue with wide segments of Jewish groupings settled in and out-

side of Palestine, allowing for the establishment of a common struggle against racism and imperialism and their settler structures, guaranteeing the rights and interests of the Jews within a liberated Arab Palestine and outside of it.

The true and lasting solution to the Jewish problem as a whole, falls within the achievement of political, economic and social democracy in all countries where Jews live. This would guarantee their political rights as first class citizens without distinction or discrimination, safeguarding equal opportunities for them, eliminating exploitation and protecting them against racial discrimination and oppression everywhere.

It is not possible to make the Palestinian people and the Arab nation carry the whole responsibility for the realization of the Jewish solution in the world. However, in achieving this democratic model in the land of liberated Palestine, an important step is taken on the road to resolving the Jewish problem and defeating racism in the world.

Perhaps many important questions recur in the minds of some of you: Where are we in relation to this future dream? Is it possible to expect the Palestinian revolution to propose a solution to the Jewish problem while it confronts the vicious attacks on its very existence? Does anyone believe that the Palestinian revolution—before the liberation of the land of Palestine—is truthfully willing to find this solution to the Jewish problem, and is capable of carrying it out? Is it not more worthwhile for the Palestinian revolution, and the revolutionary Arab forces fighting with it and supporting it, to think about the road of salvation out of the present stalemate and to think about the solution which will be imposed over the region and their own position concerning it?

For the second time, I find it necessary to clarify that the Palestinian revolution and the nationalist and revolutionary Arab forces will fight to stop the vicious attack made against them. They must work wisely to protect themselves and their masses in the coming stage. All of this does not preclude and it certainly has not prevented them from tackling the Jewish problem at its roots and in proposing the correct programme for alliance with wide segments of the Jewish groupings inside and outside the occupied homeland. To overcome Zionist racism and the Zionist state in Palestine will be extremely difficult without having achieved this alliance.

And here, brothers, are a few steps which were undertaken by the Palestinian revolution on this path as an assurance of its good intentions in proposing the formula for a democratic state, and to open the way for a wider dialogue to crystalize a complete programme. These achievements were made in two

years, during which the Palestinian revolution had encountered a vicious attack on its very existence and continuity:

1. Serious work towards promulgating laws allowing Jews to return to their Arab homelands; to annul all laws that discriminate against Jews and which prevent them from practicing their rights as first class citizens, equal with all other citizens. We know from the research done by Dr. Asaad Abdulrahman, for example, that this invitation received an affirmative response in this great Arab country of Iraq, as it did in Sudan, Morocco and Tunisia. The work is seriously proceeding to publicize these laws all over the Arab world, so that it may develop through practice. It must be stressed here that the fundamental aim of this invitation for the return of the Jewish Arab citizens is the creation of a democratic model which guarantees the rights of Jews in the Arab region, which adds to the veracity of the call for a democratic state in Palestine, and which proves through example the realism of this model.

The Palestinian revolution has fought for the rights of the Jews in Arab countries. This fight has taken various forms, namely: defending some progressive Jewish prisoners in some Arab countries; facilitating the acquisition of Arab passports for some Jewish immigrants fleeing Israel, giving them freedom of movement in deciding where to make their homelands without fear of pressure; protecting the Lebanese Jews during the bloody confrontation in Lebanon.

2. Making contact with some groups of Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union who fled the Zionist state and who now live in Europe; offering guarantees for their protection, helping them and insuring their needs for their free self-determination. As an example, West Berlin authorities have tried to evict the Soviet Jews who returned there with an excuse that their presence raises the objection of the Arab countries; the Arab countries were contacted and in turn informed the government of West Germany that this claim is groundless. I, personally, asked the president of the French National Committee to help Soviet Jews obtain freedom to stay in France if they so wish, and to give them all the guarantees of the revolution to prevent their harrassment.

3. Working to modify the Palestine National Charter to agree with the course of the Palestinian revolution and its declared political programme which embodies the structure of the democratic secular state in Palestine. An agreement has been reached for the basic modification in Article 6 of the Charter.¹ However, the conditions in Lebanon have delayed the convening of

¹Article 6 of the Palestine National Charter reads: "Jews who were normally resident in Palestine up to the beginning of the Zionist invasion are Palestinians" — Ed.

the Palestine National Conference, thus delaying the execution of the required constitutional amendment.

4. Translating the philosophy of the democratic solution into the literature of the Palestinian revolution — children's books, Palestinian literary and artistic works such as films, visual arts, poetry and prose — and through political education. The Centre for Palestinian Planning issued a statement on the philosophy of education for the Palestinian Arab masses, following lengthy hours of discussions among Palestinian and Arab educators, literary men and scientists, political and military fighters and with the evicted population of the camps. This philosophy, which has become the guideline for all educational works, is a true translation of the democratic thinking and the new progressive Arab approach towards the Jews.

5. Opening the channels and structures of dialogue with Jews in and out of occupied Palestine, regarding the democratic state for the unity of struggle against Zionism.

Undoubtedly, this alliance took shape as a progressive struggle with the members of the "Red Front," who practice military struggle against the Zionist entity.² For this reason the political dialogue with members of this front took on progressive forms, even with those imprisoned among them, such as Ehud Adiv. However, this dialogue was also initiated with sections who still hesitated in struggling militarily, although they showed readiness for the political struggle against Zionism and its racist practices in and out of the occupied land.

6. The modification of some military tactics of the revolution in accordance with the democratic principle, as part of the continuation of the popular war strategy against the Zionist entity. For example, commando strikes are not directed against those settlements whose citizens cooperate in one form or another with the revolution. In addition, those tactics which prove unsuccessful in applying this strategy are continually modified and developed.

7. The continuous juxtaposition through the media of Zionist racism and the Palestinian democratic alternative, in order to eliminate pitfalls that result from an obscured vision. Our media adopts cases in defence of the oppressed Jews. And it fights any attempt to return to reactionary and isolationist thinking in any form.

I have emphasized in my practical examples the direct approach towards

²On March 26, 1973, the Haifa District Court passed imprisonment sentences on members of a leftist cell accused by Israeli authorities of forming an "espionage and sabotage network." This group, headed by Daud Turki and Ehud Adiv, is popularly known as the "Red Front" — Ed.

the Jews. However, it is possible to say that the Palestinian approach particularly, and the Arab approach generally, serves the course of the democratic solution when this course is utilized not only in approaching the Jews, but also in dealing with ethnic and sectarian minorities in the Arab world. This approach is manifested in the struggle against the forces of sectarian isolationism in Lebanon and against counter-religious inclinations that are struggling against the Maronite forces of isolationism, but protecting the Maronites at the same time.

The realization of the democratic solution for the Kurds in Iraq, the Berbers in Algeria and Morocco and the problem of Southern Sudan are all important steps in the right direction. The liberation of women, the achievement of social justice, law enforcement, and equal opportunities for all citizens in every Arab country are all gains for the credibility of the democratic solution for the Palestinian issue. On the other hand the Arab fragmentation, the abolishment of democratic freedoms resulting in oppressive practices and the growth of sectarian isolationism, the widespread exploitation and corruption and the acceptance of some isolationist thinking in many Arab countries are unfortunately all elements that delay the realization of the democratic solution in Palestine and diminish the credibility of our declared and practical course.

We will encounter in the coming days numerous difficulties in our attempt to explain this course and its practical application. Tremendous pressures from foes and friends will confront the Palestinian revolution, pressures to put limitations on its new political course. We find ourselves in a sea of mounting waves which threaten the continuity of the revolution and its basic strength.

There is no alternative to continued struggle—and its basic and important means, armed struggle, particularly in the occupied lands—in confronting our main enemy: racist Zionism and its forced occupation of our land and its deprivation of our rights. There is no alternative but to continue the protracted struggle to liberate all our Palestinian occupied lands and to destroy racism and terminate its control over our Arab lands and the danger this brings to world peace. However, this requires the mobilization of all means of political struggle and tactical flexibility demanded by revolutionary political action.

To avoid mistakes, we must use our goals and strategies to safeguard our daily tactics but maintain flexibility in order to increase the number of our friends and to decrease the number of our enemies. We must liberate what can be forced out of the hands of the enemy, to work diligently in order to win wide sections of the Jews to become allies and friends and initiate communica-

tions with them, aimed toward reaching a common basis for building a programme confronting Zionism.

However, firmness is essential in combatting the Zionist settler entity, in rejecting the legality of its occupation over even one piece of our land or the abdication of our national rights. Our contradiction with the Zionist entity is a basic one; we must not be called upon by others to offer our recognition of the legitimacy of its racism and its threat to the Arab people. We must not be asked to abdicate that which no people should—its right of armed struggle to achieve its rights, and protect its existence and its insistence on the democratic solution within the framework of our Arab revolution. In abdicating this, we would slide into a counter-racism.

Comrades, we promise to continue our struggle against racism. We ask your support for freedom, democracy and justice in our homeland; and for just peace in the world as a whole.

Revolution until Victory.