

THE POSITION OF THE ARAB SOCIALISTS ON ISRAEL

By CLOVIS MAKSOUD

Controversial problems in any given area ought to be resolved in the light of objective realities. The solution must serve, as far as we are concerned, the interest of the ultimate realization of democratic socialism. To resort to the psychology of choosing between two evils — and the casting of our weight into the "lesser of the evils" — is not only a defeatist attitude and an escape from socialist responsibilities, but it is above all detrimental to the cause of socialism as a whole.

The growth of an ideological movement depends to a large extent on the willingness of the movement to initiate alternatives which are in harmony with the requirements of doctrine. Thus, even when a socialist movement is young and relatively weak, it should not wait until it has grown to make decisive political commitments, but it must realize that its long-run growth is contingent on its readiness and fearlessness in taking clear and correct positions.

How far this attitude will succeed is dependent on the capacity of the socialists to show the correctness of their position and expose the contradictions of the opposing ones. This declaration of position should be preceded by a careful and detached study of the situation and a cognizance of the theoretical implications of their stand.

It is imperative that the post-war socialist tactics should not be allowed to continue. Their unsocialist behavior and policies in many instances have been characterized by confusion, splits, opportunism and a pragmatic anti-philosophic approach to problems.

Their loss of initiative confined their practical usefulness to "throwing their lot" one way or the other. In this respect they drew attention. Under pressure of their left-wing elements, some parties (e.g., the British Labor Party) stated their role as an attempt to "minimize" the excesses of American policy. The Nenni Socialists of Italy fit into the same category. So rather than giving a fresh guide and leaving an impact on history, Western European socialists became, for all practical purposes, unable to provide leadership for mankind that is desperately seeking a new approach.

This must not, and does not, mean hopelessness in the cause of socialism. It is a setback — and a bad one and an unnecessary one. If we have the will, and we do, we must take the debacle of European socialism as an occasion for profound reassessment and self-criticism, to enable us to act as the vanguard of the revolutionary temper that permeates the 20th-century mind.

The Arab Fight Against Israel

I dwell on the above ideas because I find it necessary to explain the intellectual and political climate that we, the Arab socialists, reject and despise. This introduction serves also as an apology for my venturing to offer a plan for the solution of a controversial problem, a

practice many European socialists look at with skepticism, sarcasm and condescending paternalism.

In offering a plan for Palestine, I am fully aware that its acceptance cannot possibly be immediate. Even in case it is accepted, it will not in all probability be automatically implemented. However, the unforeseeability of immediate execution tends to lead many socialists to dismiss the plan as "impractical." In my opinion what is conceivable in theory is ultimately realizable in practice provided political efforts are made and the will is translated into action.

The practical implications of a socialist theoretical conception are even more feasible under revolutionary situations, as exist in the Near East. In such circumstances, demands for new frameworks are more attractive, insistence on radical changes are more effective. It is not adjustment to given conditions that is sought; the change in the basis of the body politic is the ultimate objective. This is true of the problem of Israel as it is true of the other problems of the Near East.

EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS' ATTITUDE

Needless to mention here the anti-Arab feeling that has been characteristic of the European socialist movement. Needless to give evidence of the contempt and disrespect that many left-wing elements have treated us with. Needless to expose the false and misleading conclusions they reached concerning the problems of the Near East. Besides the Palestinian question, they supported the military dictatorships in Syria and Egypt notwithstanding the persecution which the socialist and democratic elements suffered from these totalitarian regimes. Needless to show how they engineered a defamation campaign against the Arab socialists, denouncing them as "fascist," "anti-Semitic" or "so-called socialists."

This might be hard to believe. If I did not have the evidence — lots of it — in my files to prove it, I would hardly believe it myself. Yet developments in the East, especially concerning the military juntas (conceived by the Bevanites as a "short cut to progress"), have proved the correctness of our thesis and the error of theirs.

The European socialist movement, in general, has never stopped to make a serious evaluation of the Arab socialist movement. Some of the socialist leaders were, I venture to say, deliberate in this omission. There are few exceptions: G. D. H. Cole in Britain, Claude Bourdet in France, and Djilas in Yugoslavia. (The latter's dismissal was unfortunate. I remember spending with him several nights discussing the need for a theoretical clarification of the socialist position on semi-colonial areas like the near East, when I was his guest in Yugoslavia and when he was in Lebanon.)

It is therefore gratifying to see the Independent Socialist League take such a genuine interest in the problems that confront the inhabitants of the Arab world.

Moreover, its anti-Zionist position, consistent with the theoretical dictates of socialism, is a proof that the political blockade the Socialist International is imposing on us will not prove very effective. Sometimes we think that the latter's blockade and discrimination against us is a blessing in light of its reckless right-wing deviation.

ANTI-DEMOCRATIC ARAB FORCES

To put the blame totally on the socialists in Europe and America is not fair. The Arabs have in their own way contributed to the misunderstanding of their cause.

When they found themselves isolated from progressive and liberal public opinion, they sought the support of suspect elements. In many instances, the help of some anti-Semitic elements was not solicited. But in the frustration of being isolated from those whom they expected to be their allies against Zionist encroachment, their scope of selection and choice was rendered nil. In what they considered as a decisive battle, pro-

Editor's Note

With this issue we begin a discussion, unique in the American socialist press and perhaps equally unique in Europe, in which the Arab socialist point of view on Israel will be presented and will be criticized.

This discussion actually began with our June 7 issue, where we published three articles by Clovis Maksoud on "Arab Socialism and Its Parties." There too we introduced Comrade Maksoud to our readers as a spokesman for Arab socialism; he is a member of the executive of the Progressive Socialist Party of Lebanon, now studying in Britain. The third of Comrade Maksoud's articles touched on the Israeli problem; and an accompanying LA editorial, headed "Toward a Discussion" raised the question of whether his point of view went quite beyond mere anti-Zionism and actually called for the wiping out of Israel as a state.

We proposed to Comrade Maksoud that he state the position of the Arab socialists on the problem of Israel-Arab relations in a special article. At this time, we also sent him for his own information the text of the ISL resolution on Zionism, Israel and the Jewish Question (adopted 1951), to which he refers in his article.

This, then, will be the first time that our readers — and most socialists anywhere — will have an opportunity to get acquainted with the thinking of Arab socialists on this vexing question. It will also be the first time we know of that our Arab comrades will see their point of view in a "dialogue" — i.e., a comradesly discussion — with an opposing socialist point of view which is not pro-Zionist. This is the value of the present discussion in our view.

We are therefore presenting Comrade Maksoud's article (which was a good deal longer than we expected and will have to be concluded in next week's issue) in spite of the fact that we quite disagree with its main thesis with regard to the existence of Israel. But certainly we believe that the Arab socialists' view has a right to be heard.

Our reply to Maksoud for our own point of view will follow the conclusion of his article, and among other things it will also discuss his inaccuracy in setting forth the ISL position which he criticizes. —Ed.

gressive criteria for being eligible as an ally could not be easily enforced.

This gave scope to vocal anti-democratic elements in the Arab world to become more vocal. The rational democratic forces, though maintaining the allegiance of the Arab masses, were maneuvered, in the emotional excitement, to abstention (not in the absolute sense). Their European and Western ideological counterparts were in the "enemy camp."

However, the Arab socialists conducted themselves in the manner that any true socialist or progressive would. In periods of passionate involvement, only sensational extremism gets the headlines. The Arab cause was identified with feudal lords and reactionary elements. This in a way is like identifying American politics as dominated by McCarthy.

It is true that in an atmosphere of fear irresponsible extremists become central. They too are demonstrative. Politics in its various phases, or political activity, becomes a reaction to this emerging and noisy lunatic fringe.

But the noisiness, the shallow dominance, and the apparent power of these groups (in the event of socialist and genuine democratic reluctance to overcome this fringe, the apparent will become real) is not in reality a measure of the political components of our society. Their prominence is due to a temporary success in exploiting irrational fear. The continuity of this prominence, which embodies ingredients of totalitarianism, is guaranteed if liberals and socialists fall into the trap of accepting the framework of objectives "though disagreeing with the methods." By setting this hypocritical exploitation of fear as the "extreme end" of a fundamentally valid disposition, one is contributing, knowingly or otherwise, to undermining democracy and socialism.

Thus, by presenting McCarthy as an "extreme" anti-Communist, or reactionary Arab groups as "extreme" anti-Zionists, one is bringing to the fold of a basically sound, though negative, position, elements who are similar in thinking, methods and ideals to the very objects of our fear. It is becoming more and more evident that the most outspoken and the most violent voices are, always, the most insincere. The continued presence of what they appear to fight against is, in reality, their own claim to a *raison d'être*.

Thus the more conscious elements of these reactionary groups have a vested interest in the permanent existence of what they call their "enemy." The imminence of "danger" is the backbone of their eminence. The decisive defeat of the scapegoat is the beginning of the end for the lunatic fringe, unless, by reason of democratic and socialist timidity, they have succeeded in broadening the scope of their destructive activities.

IT WAS A PEOPLE'S WAR

It is therefore a fundamental error to identify the cause of the Arabs with those who pervert it to their selfish ends. Unfortunately this is exactly what has been done.

The Israel-Arab conflict is to these elements a black-and-white conflict. Israel is presented as the "only democratic country in the area" and the Arabs' insistence on their rights and their apprehension of Zionist activities is merely an attempt by the Arab governments to divert the masses' attention from the real

Presenting a Little-Known Point of View

socio-economic maladjustment under which they live.* This has been the line followed by the *New Statesman and Nation*, the [London] *Tribune*, the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and other left-wing liberal and socialist magazines.

I would state most emphatically that the Arab reactionary ruling classes are, in one degree or another, a contributing factor to the failure of the Arabs to assert their legitimate rights in Palestine and outside of Palestine in the Near East. Where imperialist influence was most pronounced, readiness to struggle against the aggressive threat of Zionism was most reluctant.

The leadership of the Jordanian army was an instrument of British diplomacy in the Zionist-Arab conflict. The Saudi Arabian government hardly contributed any serious effort in the cause of the Arabs. It was the people of Palestine who since the Balfour declaration resisted the designs of the Zionist Agency. It was the volunteers of Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon who conducted the active resistance movement. In effect, it was a people's campaign. Prominent socialists like Michel Aflak, Akram, Hourani, Salah el Bitar, Abdulla Runciwi, Abdullah Nawwas, and Ali Naser el Deen were among the leaders.

They were not motivated by a hatred of the Jews. (Many Arab Jews played a prominent role in the development of Arab radical thought. Abbou Maddara is the most prominent in the early part of this century.) They were not moved by an anti-Semitic feeling. (Arabs themselves are Semitic). They were not seeking to indulge the Arab people in xenophobic adventures.

Their fight against Zionism was in reality only a part of a much broader fight. It was a struggle against imperialism with its Near Eastern agents—reaction and Zionism. Only in this framework can we understand the validity of the Arab socialist position on the question of Palestine.

INVALID JUSTIFICATIONS

There are some justifications for the Western socialist support for Israel. But these are justifications only if we admit their theoretical impotency and their incapacity for thorough and scientific examination of the emerging problems.

Support for Israel was a protest against discriminatory practices and the inhuman persecution suffered by the Jews in Nazi Germany and other places. In this respect it is symptomatic of a humanist heritage. In reacting to anti-Semitism we share a common outlook and disposition.

But to conceive of the state of Israel as being the answer is not comprehensible unless we admit the validity of the Zionist concepts. I shall return to this subject later. It is sufficient to state here that lessons drawn from history show how a well-organized entity could maneuver the agony of a persecuted racial or religious minority toward ends that are in the final analysis obstructive to a dynamic rehabilitation of the victims.

A large number of socialists support Israel because of the pioneering achievements of some cooperative institutions there. The collective farms and the cooperatives are a segment of a total picture. To allow an attraction to a part—a small part—to be sufficient ground for active support of the whole is to blind ourselves to the inherent deficiencies of the whole, and in the case of Israel, to its inherent dangers.

It is moreover a romantic rationalization that resolves the crisis of the Western socialist conscience. Because of this, the European socialist closes his mind against seeing the whole picture of Zionism and the even bigger totality of the Near East, in order to prevent recurrence of the crisis.

In a way their conscience in these matters is exhausted. This "exhaustion" will not deter us from pressing the need for a true evaluation of the situation on their part.

QUESTIONS FOR SOCIALISTS

Have these socialists ever sincerely examined the meaning of the full impact of Zionism in the Arab world? Have they pressed to fight anti-Semitism at its roots — namely, by probing into the economic, psychological and political dislocations in their own countries? Did they ever consider that the transplantation of Jewish technical skill from Europe was the cause of this rapid advancement?

Did they ever challenge, as they should have done spontaneously, the widely held Zionist theory that Arabs were incapable of developing their areas? (I emphasize the term "spontaneously" because it is an elementary socialist attitude that no people is incapable of self-development if adequate opportunities are allowed.)

Have the Western socialists ever stopped to think that it was due to the imperialism of the West that the Arab developmental energies were channeled away in the anti-imperialist phase of our struggle?

We are sorry to say that socialists in general did not do that. That was a case of gross socialist negligence. One of the results was that the Arab socialists were against the resolution that would have brought the Asian socialists into the Socialist International (Comisco). The Rangoon conference of the Asian socialists gave the resolution the rebuff it deserved. This

*Some connoisseurs use the word "effendis" to show their familiarity with Arab social structure, not knowing that besides the absence of usage of this Turkish term the title indicated the petty-bourgeois and small-civil-servant classes. Therefore the Zionist usage of "effendis" and the Western liberals' and socialists' usage is silly, incorrect, and does not even indicate reactionaries. —C. M.

undoubtedly would allow us in Asia to develop our revolutionary direction free from the utilitarian and "let's be realistic" climate witnessed at the meetings of the Socialist International nowadays.

Let me remind readers of one additional current misconception concerning the Near Eastern question: The fact that Arab governments are trying to outbid Israel in subservience to Western strategic interests. This might lead to certain "advantages" if we believe that Israel was an isolated problem and also the unique serious problem concerning the Arabs. This is not true. Also, this irrational position, taken by certain Arab circles, notably around the intellectuals of the American University of Beirut [Lebanon], does not reflect the attitude of all socialist and democratic nationalists in the Arab world. As a matter of fact, it is prejudicial to our interests and to the unfolding of inherent aspirations and the release of our revolutionary forces. Therefore it is incorrect, and it is being fought vigorously.

Our opposition to the Middle East Security Pact, and the recent shooting by the police in Beirut of two socialist students, are only a few examples of our awareness that our anti-Israel position is but a part of our struggle against imperialism and the bipolarization of power in the world.

Zionism and the Israeli Issue

Now I shall come to the points raised by the resolution of the ISL on Zionism, Israel and the Jewish question (published in the July-August 1951 issue of the *New Internationalist*) and by the editorial in *Labor Action* on June 7 last. The reflections above are intended to serve for a clearer understanding of what I shall have to say and an introduction to the Arab socialist attitude on the problem of Palestine.

The resolution of the ISL stated that "... the Arab effendis demanded that the Jewish people, hounded in Europe, be deprived of the right to found a new life in the country of their choice."* This is, in my opinion, a misleading statement for two basic reasons:

(1) It confines the active resistance to Zionism to a certain limited class (see earlier our reference to "effendis"), and denies the broader framework of popular feeling on this problem.

(2) It presupposes several unsocialist hypotheses:

(a) Acceptance of the Zionist theory that there is a basic right for Jews to find life in the country of their choice.

(b) It disregards the means by which this right is to be executed, and it denies the interests of the people in Palestine their sovereign right to admit or refuse these claims. In other words, what is claimed by the resolution to be an act of Jewish "self-determination" is dependent for its fruition on an act of aggression and imposition. Was resistance to this policy of imposition actually an exercise of Arab legitimate rights? Was it in reality an act of depriving self-determination on the part of the Jews? This is where the resolution gets into contradictions.

Self-determination presupposes the existence of a national self. This "self" has the inherent right to determine its destiny, taking into consideration the aspirations of the human components of this national self. Are the Jews a national entity? The socialist answer must be a categorical no.

And even if they were, is it a legitimate act of self-determination that their "choice of a country" means deprivation of the inhabitants of that country of their rights to live in it? But even more important, is it to the best interests of socialist and democratic development in the Near East that a "national" state be set up in spite of the will and interests of the people of the area? Is it correct for the socialists to sanction even the establishment of Israel, even though it is not expansionist, and therefore consecrate the disruptive influences in the Arab world which for the last 40 years' imperialism have been attempting to break the unity and cohesion of the area?

We, the Arab socialists, say no. It seems to us that the "pro-war" position of the resolution (ibid., p. 227) and its advocacy of no embargo of arms to Israel because of the Arab states' depriving the Jews of the right to exercise self-determination is, in view of our definition of the terms, unsocialist and a dangerous precedent that was set up. It was morally wrong. It was, in view of the ISL's anti-Zionist record, a decision that stemmed from an error of judgment and no comprehension of the Arab case. It was, moreover, an acceptance of the appearance of Arab resistance for the real.

WHAT JEWS ARE MEANT?

Admitting that the ISL was correct in stating that the Arabs were depriving the Jews of exercising their act of self-determination, the question which the resolution did not answer was: which Jews have this right? In other words, what Jews belong to this national self? or what category of Jews? Is it every Jew? *Labor Action*, organ of the ISL, has repeatedly said no. Then what are the criteria that entitle a Jew to belong to the Jewish national self? In the resolution there is no answer.

In reality, there can be no answer unless one is willing to accept the modified Zionist thesis. It is stated that persecution and cultural background are sufficient to draw the ties that constitute a national entity. But cultural unity would draw all Jews into the framework

*Editor's note: We have taken the liberty here of correcting the quotation as given in Comrade Maksoud's manuscript, where the words "of the right" were inadvertently left out.

of the Jewish nation; persecution of a religious minority does not entitle the minority to form a "national" home. This would be a dangerous precedent and will undermine the struggle for the elimination of the causes that make persecution possible.

If the Jews that are meant are those who were in the Arab world, and who are Arabs, then their claim to residence cannot be challenged and must not be questioned. The Arab socialists do not, and will not, accept the fact that they cease to be Arabs. Any discrimination against them will not be allowed. Persecution of these Arab minorities will be vigorously fought.

Arab Jews are not the only religious minority in the Arab world. Do these Jews (or, for that matter, the Arab Christians, Druzes, etc.) have the right of self-determination (in the manner it was defined in this article)? The answer is also no.

The socialist position on this question cannot be compromised. To conceive of minorities as scapegoats has its roots not in inherent psychological dispositions of a majority but in the political and economic maladjustments. The responsibility of the socialists is not to admit such dispositions as "natural" and therefore seek a "solution" to it outside of the context where the problem arises; the responsibility lies in preventing the recurrence of such tendencies by eliminating their causes.

In stating that the Jews have a right to a country of "their choice," the question arises, in view of the fact that their choice has been Palestine, as to whether they had a right to Palestine. If so, why? In view of the overwhelming impact of Zionist propaganda, the question seems to be irrelevant to many. By accepting this fundamental Zionist premise—and it is definitely a Zionist premise—a socialist anti-Zionist position seems to us untenable.

To accept this concept of a "Jewish right to Palestine" is to bring Zionism to the realm of being an aspect of controversy the solution of which must be based on compromise. This seems to me to be the position of the ISL resolution when it supports the Israeli "defensive war" with no support to political Zionism.

THERE IS NO ANALOGY

It is on this point that misunderstanding between us and the ISL is most apparent, namely, the insistence on the part of the ISL to distinguish between Zionism and the state of Israel. This is apparent in the *LA* editorial of June 7.

The analogy—of being anti-Stalinist and not anti-Russian—with anti-Zionism is incorrect. Communism (Stalinism) is a system of government; it is a blueprint for organizing society. It is therefore institutional. It has policies and methods which are devised to further their concepts and their ideas. Whether these ideas or the Communist system is valid or not is not for me to discuss here. But the opponents of this system must distinguish between the structural, institutional and methodological features of Communism, or for that matter any other system, and the people who live under that system.

As to the Zionist question, the problem is different. Zionism is not an institutional or organizational formula. It is not a theory of how a state ought to be run or the economy organized. It is a movement to create a state for a "Jewish nation."

In other words, Israel is the fruition — partial fruition — of the Zionist movement. Israel, the sovereign and independent state, is the culmination of Zionism. This is not a philosophy of life or a phase of political and economic theory. It is a movement which considers the salvation of the Jews to be in the creation of a separate Jewish state in Palestine. It is the equation of Judaism with the existence of a mystical myth of "Jewish nationalism." In this respect, it is a threat to the Jews and to the Arabs. It is, above all, from a socialist viewpoint, an escape from political and moral responsibility.

DANGEROUS CONCEPT

But it is important to distinguish between Jews and Israelis (in the sense of Israel being a state). *LA* in many recent issues has clearly pointed this out, but in its June 7 editorial seems to be seeking to make an exception of the Jews in Israel. In taking a correct theoretical stand, exceptions undermine the correctness.

Though clear opposition to Zionist chauvinism is quite evident in issues of *LA*, the acceptance of the state of Israel in its present boundaries is acceptance of the basic Zionist theory, namely, the need for the creation of a Jewish state. To fight the intolerance and expansionism of the Israeli government is simply to fight the excesses of Zionism, which excesses you correctly conceive as inherent in their movement.

But to struggle against excesses — expansionism, treatment of non-Jewish minorities — is, despite its importance, a relative struggle and a limited one. As a matter of fact, such limitation ought to be welcomed by intelligent Zionists. As long as only their excesses are controversial, and such excesses characterize the anti-Zionist position, then the validity of their fundamental doctrine would continue to remain unchallenged. In this manner they would not only narrow the targets of their critics but in terms of logic it would be difficult to prove that the geographical confines of Israel, given the validity of their basic thesis, are a fulfillment.

Briefly, the concept of a Jewish national self that is seeking realization is a fluid concept. In its fluidity lies its danger. I cannot, therefore, distinguish Zionism from the right of Jewish self-determination.

(Concluded next week: Part II—A Plan for Palestine.)