

1936

The following article is an excerpt from the newly translated DPFLP pamphlet "Historical Development of the Palestinian Struggle." It is part of a critical analysis of the Palestinian struggle from 1936 to 1967 that was prepared by the DPFLP in 1969.

REVOLUTION OF 1936

The 1936 revolution (with all the misconceptions which accompanied it) gives us a model to study, a model which is undoubtedly one of the best models of struggle within the history of the Palestinian cause. This is because the 1936 revolution was the climax of the Palestinian struggle against both the British mandate and the Zionist existence and came after long years of peaceful struggle which had been manifested in position papers, demonstrations, intensive strikes and many efforts to persuade Britain to stop aiding the Zionist movement.

The basic value of this revolution lay in the fact that it began as a solely popular initiative without any relationship to the Palestinian bourgeois family leaderships or religious leaderships, for those leaderships were against the idea of the revolution.

The primary organizations of the 1936 revolution grew and spread among the workers who had come from the country to the city to find work (a large number of those workers had settled around Haifa). When these organizations broadened they didn't look toward the cities, but directed themselves toward the countryside where they started to organize the peasants and convince them of the necessity of the revolution. The leaderships who took the responsibility of organizing and preparing the revolution were, however, cut off from the feudal and bourgeois family leaderships who were active in the "political" arena. There was never any relationship between the two until the former decided that the revolution was imminent, but even then the contacts between the two never prospered.

The man who played a most important role in organizing the revolution materially and politically, by agitating among the workers and in the countryside, was Izzil-Deen Alkasam,¹ a simple clergyman who was not after any personal glory and preferred to work out of the limelight. Although Alkasam was more conscious of the norm of sacrifice than being at the head and leaderizing factor in the masses fight against Britain and Zionism. Through agitating among the masses for armed struggle, Al-Kassam gave this position enough strength to enable the fighting to carry on for three years after his death. Those were the years which saw a violent revolution occur in all parts of Palestine, creating new conditions in the entire Arab area.

Shortly before Al-Kassam launched the revolution, he contacted Al Hajj Amin al-Huseini and asked him to be appointed a mobil organizer to work for the preparation of the revolution. Al Huseini apologized saying, "We are trying to solve the problem politically." In 1935, Al-Kasam sent one of his men, who was called Mahmoud Salem, to Al-Huseini to inform him that Al-Kasam had decided to proclaim the revolution in the north and to ask him to do the same in the south, but Al-Huseini answered that the time had not yet come for such an act and that the political efforts being made were enough to insure the Arabs of Palestine their rights.

But these answers did not turn Al-Kasam to desperation for he viewed the situation in terms of the secret organizations he had built among the workers and poor peasants. In addition, the quantities of arms which he had secretly purchased led him to believe that the new form of struggle would impose itself on everyone in the final analysis.

On November 14, 1935, Al-Kasam fought his first battle and the British forces, searching for him, turned all of the Jinin area into a battlefield. The British were able to surround Al-Kasam and some of his comrades in a valley where he refused to escape and continued to fight along with his comrades until they had all been killed.

It is true that the Al-Kasam movement did not accomplish any of its important goals, but it did expose the family leaderships to the masses. What was the position of those leaderships after Al-Kasam's death? They refused to attend his funeral and they limited themselves to sending consoling telegrams, and that same week met with the British High Commissioner to discuss with him the necessity of British response to the Palestinian Arab's demands for their rights.

THE SECOND STAGE OF THE REVOLUTION

The first stage of the 1936 revolution saw the workers and peasants stand on the side of the armed revolution while the family leaderships stood against it trying to peacefully persuade the British.

The second stage began five months later on the 15th of April 1936, when the secret organizations of Al-Kasam were able to regather their forces and renew their work in the countryside, attempting to continue the November 14th movement. The revolution spread from the north to the south and on the 19th of April in Jaffa began a complete popular uprising.

In reaction to this uprising, the British forces destroyed entire neighborhoods of Jaffa. This was the spark which pushed the "National Committees," organized by purely popular initiative to support the revolution, to declare a general strike (while the five family parties quarrelled with one another, far removed from the popular movement).

On April 25th the National Committees forced the following parties to dissolve themselves:

- The Islamic Board (Al-Huseini)
- The Arabic Defence Party (Rajeb Nashashibi)
- The National Front Party (Abdul Latif Salah)
- The Arab Palestinian Party (Jamal Huseini)
- The Islah (Reformist) Party (Husein el-Khalidi)

The National Committees forced upon all these dissolved parties the formation of an Arab Higher Committee to lead the popular struggle which

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was manifesting itself in general strikes and armed revolution. The leaders of those dissolved parties had to keep pace with the events and accept the proposed solution.

Here we must stop for some important observations:

1) The Arab Higher Committee which was formed from the five major parties, dominated by bourgeois and feudal Palestinian families, did not consider the armed revolution as one of its tasks. It stressed in its charter "to continue striking" until the British Government changed its policy by; stopping Jewish immigration, stopping the sale of land to the Jews, and establishing a parliamentary government.

The National Committees held a conference in Jerusalem on the 8th of May, under the supervision and leadership of Al Hajj Amin Huseini. The most important decision taken at the meeting was only to stop paying taxes.

2) The National Committees which were formed through solely popular initiatives had the responsibility of backing the revolution both materially and morally, in addition, these committees were running the affairs and administration of the territories where the rebels imposed their control.

3) In spite of all types of violence and terror the British could not liquidate the revolution or even prevent it from spreading. So Britain went to the Arab rulers who were loyal to her and asked them to mediate and convince the Palestinian leaders to halt the revolution and to try to peacefully persuade Britain to take regard of their demands.

4) The Arab rulers responded to Britain's request. Leading the Arab rulers was Nouri Al Said, who arrived in Jerusalem on August 26, 1936 and asked the Arab Higher Committee to use all means to break the strike and halt the present "disturbances" because the Iraqi government would try to convince Britain to give the Palestinian Arabs their legitimate rights.

5) The Palestinian people rejected the concept of mediation and carried on their strike and armed revolution until the rulers of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Yemen intervened by sending telegrams telling the Palestinian people to "calm down."

In spite of the people's refusal, the Arab Higher Committee quickly issued a communique declaring that it had agreed to mediation and asked the people to halt the strike and all disturbances beginning October 12, 1936. With this communique the second stage of the revolution came to an end, reaffirming the manifestations of the first stage:

1) The people's rush towards the armed struggle and their rejection of the concept of negotiation with the British.

2) The hesitation of the bourgeois and feudal family leaderships and their continuous attempts to accept compromising solutions in those political negotiations.

An important element, however, appeared on the stage at this time. The Arab rulers, who stood with the leaders of Palestine on the same class grounds, attempted to intervene in order to impose a position on the Palestinian people. But the failure of the Arab mediation and Britain's refusal to stop the Jewish immigration gave the masses a new and material proof of the necessity of armed struggle as the only method to accomplish their goals. With the failure of the mediation and with the people's belief in what they were doing, the third stage of the 1936 revolution began.

THE THIRD STAGE OF THE REVOLUTION

This stage begins with an incident of important significance: the assassination of Governor Andrews of the northern district by the revolutionaries on September 27, 1937 and a communique from the Arab Higher Committee condemning the assassination.

This stage also begins with confrontations between the masses of the country and the feudal and bourgeois family leaderships. These confrontations will intensify every day until the end of the revolution.

The British occupation forces moved quickly in the face of these events and stepped up their methods of violence and terror. Even the communique condemning the assassination issued by the Arab Higher Committee could not help any of its members to escape from the British terror. Some members were arrested, others fled from the country and for those who were touring abroad in the Arab states during the assassination an order was issued preventing them from returning to Palestine.

The masses were not shocked (as was expected) for their previous experience in struggle helped them to retaliate quickly and they confronted British violence with a violence which grew from leaflets to demonstrations to strikes to armed revolution. The sphere of resistance broadened this time to include political agents, land auctioneers, spies, policemen and troops of the occupying authorities. With this total identification of the enemies, the revolution entered a stage of maturity which greatly helped in widening its scope and deepening its influence. This new position put an end to any and all shaky positions which might come from inside the ranks of the revolution. From that point on, shaky positions would come from outside the framework of the armed struggle movement.

In this stage of maturity the revolution was concentrated strongly in the areas of Nablus and Khalil and in the northern region. With the beginning of 1938 the revolutionaries had great influence in every village in those regions and the revolutionary leaders had complete control, not only militarily, but also administratively and judicially.

The main point of weakness inside the ranks of the revolution in this stage was the absence of a united leadership armed with deep political consciousness which could control the military co-ordination of operations among the different regions. This problem could not be solved by the Higher Council of Leaders which held its first meeting in the middle of 1938.

In light of this popular situation it may be asked, where were the bourgeois and feudal leaderships?

Some were under arrest or outside the country, as we mentioned before. Others were freely collaborating with the British and working hard to liquidate the revolution. Here we ought to stop in order to examine the nature of the new method which the Palestinian bourgeois and feudal leaderships followed.

In the past the method of these leaderships was striking at the people's struggle from within by accepting the concept of negotiations (to encircle the revolution politically). In the new revolutionary stage, the role of this method was terminated for these leaderships unmasked their true faces and resisted the revolution by the following methods:

1) Informing of the rebel's plans, their gathering places and their hideouts.

2) Attempting to convince the masses that the revolution was of a "party" nature.²

3) Forming what were called the "peace teams." These teams took the responsibility of following the rebels, committing crimes in the villages loyal to the revolution and making plans to assassinate the revolutionary leaders. The Defense Party and the heads of the al-Nashashibi family were behind this conspiracy.

In this stage, and after the revolution established itself and forced its authority, it became a necessity for the bourgeois and feudal Palestinian powers to fight the revolution from outside, face to face, and that was exactly what they did.

This is, however, only one side of the coin, the other side was represented by Hajj Amin al-Huseini who during the revolution was negotiating with the British and agreeing to the continuation of the mandate, while demanding an independent Palestinian government and an elected Palestinian assembly.

The armed revolution — in light of the competition between the bourgeois and feudal parties, the war launched by those parties against the revolution, these parties negotiations with the British and the absence of any co-ordination among the fronts of the revolution — began to weaken and subside. With the beginning of 1939 and World War II, the revolution came to a halt. Thus remaining in the field of the rightist reactionary political leaderships working with the same mentality and trying with this mentality to face the growing Zionist danger.

APPARENT CONCLUSIONS

The apparent conclusions that come from this quick review of the development of the 1936 revolution are:

1) The poor masses of city workers and country peasants were the material elements of the revolution and its initiators.

2) The bourgeois and feudal leaderships stood continuously against the revolution by introducing the logic of peaceful negotiations and accepting partial demands on the one hand, and by resisting the revolution with arms on the other. These leaderships, even in the stage when they pretended to be with the revolution, could not catch up with the popular initiatives of the masses nor be on the level of the masses.

3) The absence of the existence of an effective, united, revolutionary — ideological leadership at the head of the revolution is the factor which enabled the bourgeois feudal leaderships to manipulate the direction of the revolution.

We will discover later, when we complete our review of the following stages of the Palestinian struggle, that the same law will continue to dominate and is the same law which led to the abortion of all other revolutionary attempts before and after 1948. In light of this we should stop and examine the Palestinian work to see if it was able to face up to the situation according to the concrete facts existing within it.

1. The al-Kassam revolution is usually spoken of separately, but we think it was an original preparation for the 1936 revolution.

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