



HAWATMEH - BURCHETT : FACT OR FANCY ?

«Tell no lies, claim no easy victories»
Amilcar Cabral

A highly respected radical French journalist published a book in 1970 in which he expressed sympathy for the Popular Democratic Front's position (*La Résistance Palestinienne*, Gerard Chaliand). His opinions of the P.F.L.P. were based on the account he heard from PDF spokesmen. We were disturbed not because Chaliand criticized us, but because we ascertained that his criticisms had a hollow base. Upon challenging his revolutionary integrity, Chaliand came to meet our leaders and cadres so as to assess the truth for himself. As a result of his visit with us, Chaliand published a long article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* « Le Double Combat du F.P.L.P. » in which he withdrew certain P.D.F. allegations and also criticized himself by admitting that some of his views expressed in the above book, concerning the P.F.L.P. were incorrect. Till now, we respect Chaliand's courage.

As of late, another well known and respected radical journalist has seemingly fallen prey to Hawatmeh's opinions. Ironically this journalist, Wilfred Burchett, based his opinions on Hawatmeh's account only and did not bother to cross check the latter's viewpoints with that of the P.F.L.P.'s. It is quite regretful that Burchett did not learn a lesson from the Chaliand experience. We wonder however, would Burchett have the moral courage to admit the inaccuracies and mistakes which he reported as facts? Though Mr. Burchett is quite well versed in Indo-Chinese affairs, a fact for which we have respected him, he possesses neither the elementary nor the rudimentary facts concerning the Middle East, and the Palestine question in particular.

However, if Mr. Burchett insists on writing on the Middle East, we suggest that a) he bridge the gap between the truthfulness of what he reports and what actually is ; b) and that the next time he finds himself in Beirut — he could seek an interview with the P.F.L.P. Who knows, perhaps he too might find the need for self-criticism after such an interview. The only thing we promise is to deal with him as we do with all progressive journalists : firm, frank honesty coupled with a revolutionary spirit that respects facts and one which knows how to differentiate between opinion and fact.

Before we dissect Burchett's reporting of the Hawatmeh interview, we would like to register our objection to the closing paragraph of Burchett's «Syria gets taste of U.S. Diplomacy» (Guardian - March 13, 1974), which if read carefully could be interpreted as a slur against the Palestinian people. He writes :

«The idea of a Palestinian state, as the first step along the road to

a full-scale national home which will embrace the 3.3 million Palestinians scattered throughout the Middle East - including about half a million in Israel itself - has been seized upon with passionate enthusiasm. It is a factor that neither Dr. Kissinger nor in his own separate way, Dr. Habash can ignore.»

Though Burchett saves himself linguistically by inserting «nor in his own separate way» to differentiate Kissinger from Habash, the mere fact of lumping the two together is an insult to our people. For as is obvious, whereas Kissinger represents the interests of U.S. Imperialism, our main enemy, Comrade Habash to our masses is respected because of his relentless militancy.

Having disposed of some preliminary remarks, let us deal directly with Burchett's interview of Hawatmeh published in the March 6, 1974 issue of the Guardian, and some of the statements of the March 13 article already cited above.

The crux of Burchett's «reporting» is concerned with the proposed Palestinian state. However, instead of reporting, he took it upon himself to offer his services as a PR man for the PDF position.

Based on interviews he conducted, he deduces that :

- Most Palestinians are in favor of the «mini-state» ;
- Most of the P.L.O. with the exception of the P.F.L.P. and the A.L.F. are for the «state» ;
- And finally, that Iraq is the actual provocator of those opposed to the «mini-state».

Though Burchett did not claim to possess scholarly abilities, we would like to remind him that even a political article requires that facts be stated even if they might be damaging to one's wishful thinking.

Firstly, how did Burchett, Hawatmeh and the West Bank dignitaries arrive at the conclusion that the masses are dying to see the establishment of a «mini-state» ? With no evidence to show, Burchett quotes Awad of the West Bank : «People in the occupied areas are unanimous for an independent state.» (Guardian, March 6, 1974). Furthermore he writes : «Among the guerillas who are doing the fighting, the opinion seems unanimous in favor of the state.» (Guardian, March 13, 1974).

In the meantime, many of the mass organizations in the Palestinian camps and elsewhere have to this day registered a categoric refusal of the proposed state. (The Workers Union, Palestinian Women's Commission, Writers Union, Student etc). To elaborate on this point, we need only look at the elections of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) held in Lebanon. Though all the elected candidates were from Fateh, it must be pointed out that the electorate knew quite well that

even these Fateh people are opposed to the Palestinian state. In fact about 70% of those elected are opposed to capitulation, hence they refuse the «mini-state». In these same elections, the P.F.L.P. candidates who were expected to receive no more than 10% of the votes received on the average 35% of the total votes.

On the other level, various petitions signed by residents of camps Ein Al-Helwa and Rashideya directed to the P.L.O. executive stated their categoric refusal of the state.

Numerous other examples can be cited to disprove Burchett's reported allegations. One wonders what type of mysterious research and analytical tools led Burchett to make such a claim ?

As to the question of the West Bank residents, we can at best describe their position as one of legitimate and justified confusion. Hence to claim they are overwhelmingly in favour of the state would be quite erroneous. It is our task as a unified P.L.O. to clarify to our masses the impact of the October war. Those who at present favor the formation of a state do so primarily because they fear that the only other available alternative is a return to Hussein's rule, a fact which they dread and which we have historically and categorically refused.

In opening the door for Hawatmeh to shed light upon us, Burchett registers the former's remarks : «We denounce demagogic and incorrect lines such as that of Habash's. His is a typical leftist opportunist line consisting of advancing strategic slogans but avoiding any practical steps to implement them. The practical results of his rejection of creating a national state would be to abandon the territories to be evacuated to Jordan's King Hussein.»

Again due to Burchett's political blinders, he falls short on the methodological end of the argument. In other words in confining himself to this limited either/or scheme («state» or Hussein), he in fact limits the possibilities at hand to a rather rigid and closed system of analysis.

- Why must the refusal of A (state) mean the automatic acceptance of B (Hussein) ?
- Is this either/or situation the only scheme within which we could operate ?
- Will the acceptance of (A) result in the defeat of the Imperialist plan being presently expounded by the U.S. through their «peace» dove, Mr. Kissinger.
- Is not the offering of (A) in fact the tool by which Imperialism hopes to silence once and for all the voices of revolution i.e., the Palestinian resistance movement personified in armed struggle ?

The real question then is not whether one is for or against (A) or (B).

rather we see that given the present balance of powers internationally and locally, that our number one aim is the exposing and stopping of the Imperialist plan - a plan whose ultimate aim is not only the extirpation of the resistance but also the elimination of the actual idea of resistance, hence revolution.

If the principal contradiction is between Imperialism and the forces of its negation, the Arab masses, then in discussing the proposed state we must first and foremost determine whose solution it is, and under what specific historical conditions is it being proposed.

Mr. Hawatmeh and Mr. Burchett, is it really «opportunistic» to request that in our analysis we invoke a major point of Marx's methodology i.e. historical specificity ? Simply put, we are not against the establishment of a Palestinian state, nor are we opposed to a «National Authority» to rule over this state. We do however have serious reservations as to the actualization of these plans in the present historical context. Furthermore based on our understanding of Imperialism, we are certain that in offering a Palestinian state, they do not do so on a silver platter. It is more like the stick and the carrot. In short, the state will be a sentinel state, a cemetery for the resistance movement.

We ask that you not confuse matters by making comparisons to the Vietnamese case when you fail to establish the proper basis upon which such a comparison can actually take place. «Our strategic aim is a democratic state in the whole land of Palestine... The strategic aim of the Vietnamese people is also to unite their country and create a democratic society. But they adopted a step-by-step process. Our approach must be similar... At this stage we are fighting to end Israel's occupation of our lands. We are fighting for Palestinian self-determination - the Israelis evacuation of the occupied land and the creation of a national democratic state.» (Hawatmeh, Guardian March 6, 1974).

The sad part of this statement is that it was said by the leader of the P.D.F., one of the Palestinian organizations, and reported by a man whom we always considered as knowledgeable concerning Vietnamese affairs. Allow us to point out that the Vietnamese in following a «step-by-step process» did so only as a result of political and military strength. They went to Paris because they had a mass armed movement at their disposal. In accepting a ceasefire they did so because they maintained the right to oppose U.S. intervention in their internal affairs, plus the PRG, a well organized revolutionary force in the southern part of Vietnam controlled (then, perhaps

HAWATMEH-BURCHETT : FACT OR FANCY ?

tual basis) rather than clarifying to his readers the on-going debate among various elements of the P.L.O.

Is it not ludicrous to think that the P.F.L.P., waited for Iraq's O.K. before it registered its refusal of all capitulationist proposals including ; U.N. resolution 242, the proposed «state» and Hussein's Federation etc. ? The outright slander however is that they accuse Iraq of encouraging the resistance to take refuge in Iraq away from the center of our struggle - and actually imply that the P.F.L.P. was in agreement to such plans.

We do not need to defend Iraq, however as P.F.L.P., we categorically reject the allegation that Iraq asked us to stop our struggle and take refuge in their country for the time being. As P.F.L.P., our answer to the Imperialist plan has always included the need to increase and heighten the level of our struggle in a) the occupied territories ; b) Jordan ; c) all areas where our masses live. To be accused of wanting to take refuge is really quite contrary to our daily practice on all levels, political, military and mass work.

One might deduce that Burchett's ability in analyzing political developments in the resistance movement might be limited, but to our surprise he seems to suffer from an inability of reporting simple facts. In his March 6 article, he claims: «On February 24, at a mass meeting in the Beirut Municipal Stadium, 10,000 Palestinians rallied to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the formation of the P.D.F.» Not that numbers really matter, but a fact is a fact and should be reported as such. This writer who was also present at the rally estimated the participants at 2,000, maximum 3,000. Allowing for a margin of error let us say four to five thousand, that leaves Mr. Burchett a 100% off the mark. In addition, Burchett cited the figure 10,000 without adding that the quoted figure is his own estimate.., or whose is it?

After being subjected to Hawatmeh's overt and Burchett's covert invective, we feel that it is up to the progressive reader to critically look at the issues and posit them in their proper historical context. Upon so doing, the absurdity of accusations such as «leftist opportunist» and «demagogic» would become crystal clear.

As of this writing, a Palestinian summit conference has already held one meeting. The results will be reported in the next issue of the bulletin. We also intend to discuss the working papers proposed to the P.L.O. and we will publish our suggestions to the Palestine National Council in a special issue and let the facts speak for themselves.

more so new), a major part of that region. This «step-by-step» process you espouse is not new, but apparently you seem unable in making the connection between this process with the existing conditions i.e., the balance of power.

Had our movement enjoyed such conditions, we guarantee you that the establishment of the state you are talking about would have been the direct result of our armed struggle and not due to either the «benevolence» or «altruism» of Imperialism.

As to Hawatmeh's claim that «At this stage we are fighting to end Israel's 1967 occupation of our lands», one must again express some doubt. No! We are fighting for the development of our potential capacity so as to wage a true people's war. After all, we can not mechanically differentiate between 1967 and the pre-1967 period, for that would indicate a shallow understanding of Zionism's intent for expansion.

If Imperialism has decided that some of the occupied lands are negotiable, we should not jump on the bandwagon and claim that our immediate, tactical goal is the return of lands captured in 1967. This however does not preclude a hypothetical situation in the future where only after a long period of armed struggle we can liberate these territories and then use them as a base for the liberation of the whole of Palestine. Such would be the proper material base upon which a legitimate people's «National Authority» can be founded. My dear sirs, reality which we are not willing to overlook has once again put your wishful thinking to sham.

As regards the second point we deduced from Burchett, some clarification is required. It is true that when the first working paper was proposed the Al-Saika had signed it, however due to pressures from their organizational base, they no longer support it and in fact they vociferously oppose the proposed «mini-state».

As to the third point which Burchett bases on the following quote from a P.D.F. responsible: «The essence of the discussion centered around Iraq's proposal, supported by George Habash of the P.F.L.P. that the resistance movement should reject all current efforts at a solution, should reject the formation of a Palestinian state and should all withdraw into Iraq to await a more propitious revolutionary situation.» Burchett of course is not responsible for this P.D.F. statement, but then should he not have had the moral courage to question the implicit allegations of the statement. Not having done so could only mean that Burchett was more interested in propagating a position (without having a proper fac-