

Part 2/ The 1948 War

Editor's note: The first part of this article was printed in WV No. 33, 22 November 1973. In the ensuing period the Spartacist League has undertaken internal discussion on the national question as it applies to interpenetrated peoples generally and the Near East in particular. In the course of this discussion we have reviewed our earlier position on the 1948 Arab-Israel war, which is found in Spartacist No. 11, March-April 1968.

The establishment of the Zionist state of Israel was one of the consequences of the dissolution of the British Empire following World War II. Six years of imperialist war in Europe and the Far East had drained the resources of the leading colonial power to the point of bankruptcy, engendering mounting social crisis in England and setting the colonies aflame with independence struggles.

The British working class demonstrated its "gratitude" for Winston Churchill's "victory" over German imperialism by sweeping him out of office in the 1945 elections. After a generation in opposition the Labour Party, with Clement Attlee as Prime Minister and Ernest Bevin (a right-winger within the party) as Foreign Secretary, crossed over to the government benches on July 17. Bevin soon made clear the new government's intention to fully enforce the 1939 "White Paper" on Palestine, which restricted Jewish immigration. Detention camps were established in Cyprus for captured illegal immigrants and additional British troops were dispatched to police the Palestine Mandate area.

Battle Over Immigration

During World War II the Hagannah, armed wing of the Jewish Agency, and the Irgun, a rightist Zionist commando group, made a truce with the British. The so-called Stern Gang, which had a reputation as fascists within the Zionist spectrum, split with the Irgun over the truce and continued guerrilla operations throughout the war.

With the end of World War II and Bevin's moves to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine, the Hagannah and Irgun resumed commando operations. In October 1945 they cut the Palestine railway system in 153 places, totally disrupting traffic. On 20 February 1946 a coordinated attack by the Zionist armed forces hit the Mount Carmel radar station, three RAF airfields (destroying 15 planes) and a multitude of police posts. On June 16, the Hagannah elite force, the Palmach, knocked out all bridges and rail lines that crossed the Palestine border. The British responded by occupying Jewish Agency offices and conducting mass arrests. The Zionists, in turn, retaliated by blowing up British military headquarters in Jerusalem's King David Hotel on July 22, killing 80 English, Arabs and Jews.

As the struggle between the Zionists and the British dragged out during the next two years, the Mandate government ordered mass dragnets and arrests, cordoning off whole cities and placing thousands of suspects in detention camps in Palestine. Additional thousands of "illegal immigrants" were confined in the Cyprus camps. The main conflict centered on this question of immigration from Europe.

The prospective Jewish immigrants were hardly the typical picture of fat,

arrogant, imperialist-bribed colonialists bred on Kipling's "white man's burden." Rather, they were the wretched survivors of the Nazi occupation who were "liberated" by the Allies only to have their concentration camps converted into "displaced persons" camps. At the end of World War II, these camps in West Germany held over 100,000 Jews; but the outbreak of pogroms in Poland and the Balkans during the summer of 1946 swelled the numbers in these camps to a quarter million.

In the United States, the Socialist Workers Party (the Trotskyist Party at that time) campaigned to force the government to drop its racist immigration quota system, which discriminated against Eastern Europeans, in order to permit Jews into the U.S. However, as many scholars have pointed out, "Zionists preferred to see Jewish refugees go to Palestine..." (David Brody, "American Jewry, Refugees and Immigration Restriction," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, June 1956). Far from opposing the discriminatory immigration quotas, Rabbi Wise (a leading Zionist) had testified in 1939 congressional hearings, "I have heard no sane person propose any departure or deviation from existing laws now in force" (*ibid.*). The reasons were obvious: if hundreds of thousands of European Jews came to America, then hopes for a Jewish Palestine would be shattered.

U.S. Imperialism Replaces Britain

Shortly after World War II there was a sharp recession, especially acute in England, which bottomed at the beginning of 1947. Domestic social/economic crisis suddenly awakened the Labour government to the fact that it could no longer afford to police the British Empire. In the Mandate area England had some 80,000 regular troops and 16,000 policemen, along with the British-trained, British-officered and British-equipped Transjordanian Arab Legion, all of which represented a considerable drain on the budget.

In rapid succession the government announced on January 28 that Britain was leaving Burma, on February 18 that the Palestinian question would be submitted to the UN and on February 20 that His Majesty's troops would pull out of India no later than June 1948. The next day the British ambassador to the U.S. informed Secretary of State Marshall that England could not continue to supply military aid to Greece.

At the time, U.S. corporations owned 47 percent of the oil in the Near East. The oil companies were solicitous of Arab "good will" and hence hostile to the aspirations of the Zionists. Secretary of Defense Forrestal went on a nationwide campaign to whip up an "energy crisis" scare in order to build a lobby against partition. The State Department had a large component of Near East "experts" who were pro-Arab and, moreover, had the ear of Marshall.

Why, then, did the U.S. support partition? The international Zionist lobby was strident; but it was certainly not strong enough to get Truman to support a policy counterposed to U.S. imperialist interests in the region. Truman's desire for the "Jewish vote" in the 1948 elections no doubt played a role as well, though it also was not

decisive. He certainly can have felt no sympathy for the thousands of "displaced persons" in Europe or else he would have opened U.S. borders to them.

Stalin evidently supported partition at this point in the conviction that it would further disintegrate the British presence in the Near East. But while the U.S. was moving in to replace the British, it is doubtful that Truman wished to step up the pace (considering the unrest in France and Italy, not to mention nearby Greece). The main interest of U.S. imperialism in the creation of a Zionist state in Palestine was, rather, as a contributing force to balkanizing the Near East and as a lightning rod to deflect the aroused national and class aspirations of the Arab fellahin and proletariat.

Partition

When the UN passed the partition resolution on 29 November 1947 there were some 600,000 Jews and 1.2 million Arabs in Palestine. Contrary to the story-book propaganda image of hardy Zionist pioneers hoeing the land on isolated kibbutzim, in fact over half the Jewish population was concentrated in three large cities: 150,000 in Tel Aviv, 100,000 in New Jerusalem and 80,000 in Haifa.

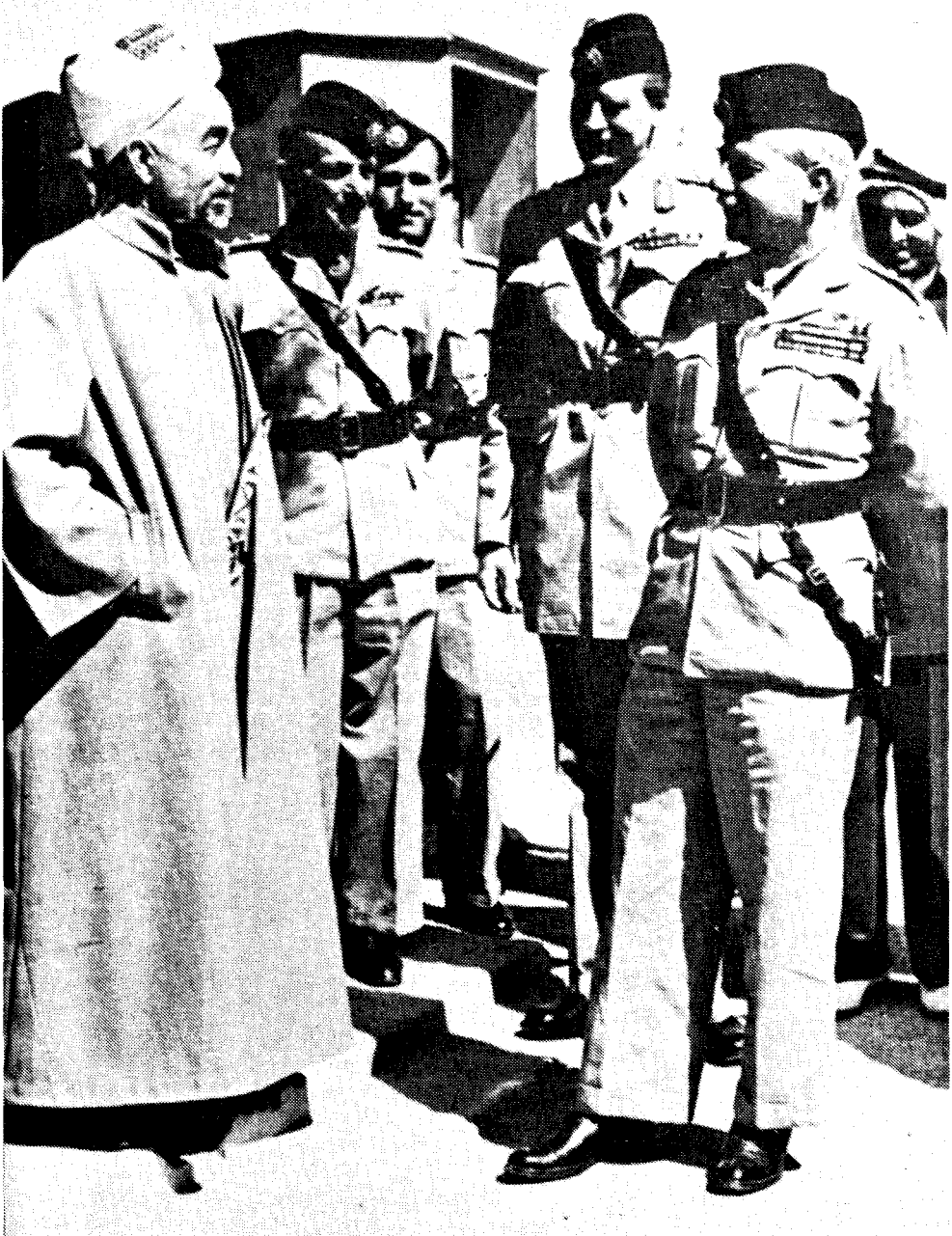
These cities and others were either "mixed" (such as Haifa, which had 70,000 Arab residents) or were adja-



Arab civilians fleeing Haifa following Hagannah

cent to Arab cities (such as the 70,000 Arabs living next door to Tel Aviv in Jaffa). The proposed "Jewish state" had every major city, including the port cities of Haifa and Tel Aviv and the Arab city of Jaffa, except for Jerusalem which was "internationalized." Further, the Zionist state would include the best citrus lands (and was expected to pay the Arab state 4 million pounds yearly in consequence).

At the time partition was announced, the Jews owned only 6 percent of the land in Palestine; under the UN-approved plan they were to get 55 percent of the total area. The Zionist state would encompass 538,000 Jews and 397,000 Arabs, while the Arab state included some 804,000 Arabs and only 10,000 Jews. No wonder the



King Abdullah of Transjordan talking with Arab Legion commander Glubb.

ASSOCIATED PRESS, MAY 13, 1948

of the Zionist State: A Marxist Analysis



Attack in April 1948.

PRENTICE/HALL

Zionists rejoiced over partition while the Palestinian Arabs cursed it.

Inter-Communal Conflict

Immediately following the UN partition vote inter-communal strife intensified sharply. In "mixed" cities sniping went on around the clock. Between cities, supply convoys were regularly ambushed. 50 Jews and 50 Arabs a week died from this irregular warfare. The Grand Mufti called (from Damascus) for a general strike after the announcement of the UN resolution. But it was totally ineffective as the Zionists lived behind the walled fortress of their closed economy. The Mufti also called upon his "Home Guard," nominally 50,000 strong, to rise up in arms. But the only arms they possessed were ancient firearms of dubious usefulness, and much of their time was taken up by shootouts with other "Guards" who supported effendis antagonistic to the Mufti.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the inter-communal fighting which followed on the heels of the UN partition vote was that it spread even to the few areas, like the Haifa docks and oil refineries, where there had been a long tradition of common Arab and Jewish class struggle. Christmas was "celebrated" in Palestine in 1947 with an orgy of bomb throwing, sniping and ambushes, especially in Haifa and the "no-man's land" between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, resulting in more than 100 deaths. On December 30, members of the Irgun threw bombs from a passing vehicle into a group of Arab workers standing at the gates of a Haifa oil refinery, killing 6 and wounding 47. Arab workers in the plant then attacked Jewish workers with knives and pickaxes, killing 41 and wounding 15.

Enter the Arab League

The British-sponsored Arab League met in Cairo from December 12 to 17. While each member state truculently denounced the Zionists and championed the cause of the Palestinians and Arab unity, nonetheless each was interested only in how much of Palestine it might carve out for itself—and in preventing its fellow members from carving out too much.

The meeting was called at the initiative of the Iraqi prime minister Salah Jabr, who was the most radical in his rhetoric and proposals, calling for immediate armed intervention. Jabr knew he was sitting on a volcano of social unrest at home and needed the diversion a "Holy War" against Zionism would bring. But he was too late. Following the publication of a new

defense treaty with Britain on January 16, huge student demonstrations broke out, followed by workers and unemployed taking to the streets. Consequently, throughout the 1948 Arab-Israeli war most of the Iraqi army was tied up in keeping order in Baghdad.

King Abdullah of Transjordan was the sole surviving son of the sheriff of Mecca and dreamed of undoing the historic injustice done to his side of the royal family in the Versailles Treaty. As a first step to reestablishing a Greater Syria under Hashemite rule he was intent on capturing the part of Palestine allotted to the Arabs, especially Jerusalem, the third-ranking "Holy City" of Islam and a suitable site for his throne. Syria, too, may have dreamed of a reborn Greater Syria, yet it had but one poorly equipped division while Abdullah had the crack Arab Legion.

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem quite naturally wanted no regular armies to intervene, especially Abdullah's, for the Hashemite kingdom could only be built at the Mufti's expense. Instead he wanted equipment for his irregulars. It was finally decided to train and equip some 3,000 volunteers, the "Arab Liberation Army," under Fawzi el-Kaukji, a veteran of the guerrilla fighting following the 1936 general strike in Palestine and of the pro-Axis military coup in Iraq in 1941.

Such byzantine negotiations could naturally not ignore the Zionists. In November 1947, prior to the Cairo meeting of the Arab League, Abdullah had already had a secret meeting with Golda Meyerson (Meir) representing the Jewish Agency, in which he confided to her his plans for occupying those parts of Palestine designated for the Arabs, because "we both have a common enemy who will obstruct our plans—the Mufti." Likewise, in January 1948 Kaukji met with a Jewish Agency representative at his headquarters in central Palestine and promised neither to attack the Jews nor to come to the aid of the pro-Mufti Palestinian irregulars. While he broke the former part of his promise, attacking several settlements in the Galilee, he scrupulously kept the second part.

Flight of the Palestinian Arabs

While the period of December 1947 to March 1948 was largely marked by inter-communal strife and diplomatic negotiating between the Arab states, the dominant aspect of April and early May was a concerted drive by the Zionists to secure their lines of communication and, subsequently, to drive out the Arabs from areas allotted to the Jews under partition. That the Zionists intended at the beginning to carry out such a mass expulsion is doubtful, but they certainly took advantage of the panic which set in among the Arab population.

On April 9 the Irgun launched its notorious massacre at Deir Yassin, killing 254 Arabs, most of them unarmed. The remaining 150 villagers were dumped into trucks and paraded through Jewish sections of Jerusalem. While the Jewish Agency expressed its "disgust" at Deir Yassin in a cable to King Abdullah, nonetheless this atrocity was exploited by the Jewish Agency and the Hagannah to induce terror and flight.

In Haifa on April 22 the Hagannah launched a large-scale assault which overran important government buildings and occupied key sections of the Arab quarters. The Hagannah demanded that Arabs turn over all arms, that all non-Palestinians (Syrians, Iraqis, etc.) be handed over for trial and detention, and recognition of Jewish control over the entire city. Instead of submitting to these onerous terms, the Arab population evacuated the city. Three days later the Irgun launched a well-armed attack on the Arab city of Jaffa. While the Jewish Agency disclaimed respon-



Motorcycle scouts of the Arab Volunteer Armies.

PRENTICE/HALL

sibility for this attack, when the Irgun disintegrated and its advance was stopped, the Hagannah came to its rescue and 70,000 Arabs had to flee.

Thus, even before the proclamation of the Zionist state, the Palestinian "refugee problem" had been created. More than 300,000 Arabs had fled to exile as a result of Zionist terror, inadequate or non-existent Palestinian leadership and (in some places) exhortations by the "Arab Liberation Army" to clear battle areas around the "mixed cities."

Proclamation of Israel and the Arab Armies' Invasion

As the last British troops embarked on May 14 the State of Israel was proclaimed by the Jewish Agency leaders. The next day the armies of five Arab states crossed the borders into former Mandate Palestine. It is important to have a clear picture of the military situation at this point in order to judge whether the ensuing struggle was, as the Zionists (and Stalin) claimed, a war of national liberation or, on the contrary, a war of national expansion on the part of Israel.

In the first place, British troops were no longer a factor. This meant that, except in the north around Galilee, the only effective military forces in the former Mandate area were those of the Zionists. The Arab Legion, the main opponent of the Hagannah in the early fighting, had to cross the Jordan River and travel some 80-90 miles before making contact with the Zionist forces around Jerusalem. Thus much of the action in the early days of the 1948 war consisted of the Hagannah expanding the area of its control, filling the vacuum created by the departure of the British.

Secondly, the balance of military forces was roughly even. As of May 15 the Hagannah had mobilized approximately 25,000 regulars, who faced 10,000 Egyptians, 4,500 Arab Legionnaires, 7,000 Syrians, 3,000 Iraqis and 3,000 Lebanese, for a total of 27,500 on the Arab side. The Arab armies were initially better equipped, but the Zionists had the advantage of short lines of communications and tight defense lines in a country the size of Vermont.

Most important of all, however, the Zionist command was (more or less) unified while each Arab army pursued an independent and often contradictory

policy. The final Arab invasion plans had designated Iraqi general Nur ad-Din Mahmoud as "Commander of the Regular and Irregular Forces for the Saving of Palestine." He was supposed to lead a coordinated pincer attack in the north combined with blocking maneuvers in the south, with the objective of capturing Haifa. However, on May 13 Abdullah informed the other members of the Arab League that he was to be supreme commander himself and was not interested in Haifa but Jerusalem. Consequently all plans were changed, throwing the Arab armies into chaos, and a superior military strategy was scotched in favor of one that had as its highest objective making Abdullah King of Jerusalem. As he had repeatedly told the Zionists, Abdullah had no interest in occupying the Jewish districts; not once during the war did he attempt to do so.

The actual fighting during the first four weeks of the war (May 15 to June 11) centered on lines of communication with Jerusalem. Because of Zionist military effectiveness, the lack of coordination of the Arab armies and the main Arab contender's exclusive interest in occupying the non-Jewish areas, the physical existence of the Jewish community in Palestine was never in question during the course of the fighting.

After four weeks of fighting the Arab Legion held Latrun, a strategic point blocking the main road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; however, the Hagannah had managed to bypass the area by building a new road. General Glubb's Legionnaires had also taken Sheikh Jarrah, a village whose only importance was that it was midway between New Jerusalem and Mt. Scopus. And they had occupied the "Old City" of Jerusalem whose significance was purely religious and symbolic. The Iraqi army took Jenin, from where they did not budge for the rest of the war. The Egyptians took three settlements in the Negev. Militarily, the first round was a stand-off.

The UN-imposed four-week truce lasted from June 11 to July 9 and was used by both sides to resupply their forces. The Arab states expanded their troop commitments by 15,000 men. But it was the Zionists who benefitted most from the lull. Reflecting Russian policy, which considered the Israeli struggle a progressive anti-imperialist war of national liberation, Czechoslovakia de-

continued on page 10

Continued from page 7

1948 War

livered substantial numbers of arms and an entire airfield. From the U.S. and England the Zionists obtained bombers and fighters.

By the end of the truce period Israel had achieved clear military advantage, and in the ensuing "Ten Day Offensive" it proceeded to maul Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army in the Galilee and capture Ramleh, Lydda and adjacent Arab villages in central Palestine. Wherever the Hagannah advanced into Arab territory the civilian population was expelled and their homes and villages bulldozed and blown up. By the end of October more than 472,000 Arabs had

beyond replacing Nixon with Ford.

The real political activities of the AFL-CIO bureaucracy lately have not centered on forcing impeachment (Meany couldn't care less about that), but on electing the so-called "veto-proof" (i.e., overwhelmingly Democratic) Congress. The end purpose of Meany's present maneuvers is to elect the militaristic, virulently anti-Soviet Henry Jackson in 1976 and re-establish the old Cold War liberal/labor/Dixiecrat coalition. Related to this goal are his efforts to draw the Wallace forces into the mainstream of the Democratic Party.

For New Elections and a Labor Candidate

The response to Watergate by most of the ostensibly revolutionary left has simply been to tail after the liberal Democratic and Meanyite backers of impeachment—except for Tim Wohlforth's Workers League which recently joined the Republicans in pushing for resignation (*Bulletin*, 7 May). Had the left responded instead by demanding that the unions force immediate presidential elections and field a labor candidate, this would have been both a serious attack on the Meany/Abel/Woodcock bureaucracy and on the structural bonapartism built into American bourgeois "democracy." Such a demand could win great popularity, for Gerald Ford is hardly more popular among union ranks than Nixon himself. And rather than feigning heart attacks over Nixon's language, the task of revolutionary socialists is to focus on Nixon's real crimes against the working masses. Impeachment is not enough!

Play the Watergate Tapes in Full on Nationwide Radio!

Abolish the Secret Political Police (FBI, CIA)!

Abolish the Standing Army and Its Officer Corps! For a Workers Militia Based on the Trade Unions!

For Labor Action to Force Immediate Presidential Elections! For a Workers Candidate!

Break With the Republicans and Democrats—Dump Meany/Woodcock—For a Workers Party Based on the Trade Unions! Forward to a Workers Government! ■

been driven off their land and into exile.

After a second truce which lasted from July 18 to October, the Zionists concentrated on wiping out the Egyptian positions in the Negev and mopping up the Galilee. At the end of the fighting in early 1949 they had occupied all the territory allotted to the Jews under the UN partition plan and, in addition, had taken the eastern Galilee, parts of central Palestine (including the new city of Jerusalem) and parts of the Negev. Egypt took the Gaza strip and Transjordan got the West Bank. Abdullah, despite some battlefield reverses, now fulfilled his lifelong dream and crowned himself King of (a part of) Jerusalem and the (partially) restored Hashemite Kingdom. Not to be outdone, Egypt set up an "Arab Government of Palestine" in the Gaza strip.

Hebrew Nation in Palestine?

The 1948 war established the framework in which the subsequent Arab-Israeli conflicts occurred. For this reason alone it requires careful study by revolutionary socialists. In addition to the obvious question of what position should be taken by Marxists in this conflict, it raises a number of other important political issues: Were the Jews in Palestine a nation? If so, do Leninists support their right to self-determination? Was the 1948 war an application of this right? And, more generally, what is the significance of self-determination for interpenetrated peoples?

Certainly by 1948 the Jewish-Zionist communities of Palestine had achieved one of their goals, having constituted a distinct national entity. (The point at which this occurred can be placed at the defeat of the 1936-39 Arab general strike and uprising, after which the Palestinian Jews had a functioning closed economy, essentially independent of the Arab communities. This separation laid the basis for the development of the Jewish economy during the second World War, when the isolation of Palestine compelled the development of entire new industries.) We say this as recognition of an accomplished fact, not implying "approval" of any kind.

Lenin and Trotsky resolutely opposed the bourgeois ideology of Zionism and opposed Jewish settlement in Palestine. But a nation is not a metaphysical moral category; it is a social category with a material content. Stalin's pamphlet, *Marxism and the National Question*, written in 1913 when he was still a Bolshevik and under Lenin's guidance, defines a nation in the following terms: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" [emphasis in original]. This definition explicitly denied that European Jews constituted a nation. They were considered by Stalin and Lenin to be either assimilated (as in Western Europe) or an oppressed caste (as in Russia and Eastern Europe generally).

The Zionists also understood that for dispersed European Jewry, a "people

without land," the formation of a nation was impossible without finding a corresponding "land without people"—or one that could be turned into a land without people through forced expulsion of the native inhabitants. This is what they proceeded to do in Palestine, first pushing the Arab fellahin off the land (bought from the feudal landowners), then constructing a closed economy of the Jewish communities and, finally, in 1948 proceeding to conquer the greater part of Mandate Palestine with an army organized prior to Partition, and to expel the majority of its Arab population.

Out of the destruction of European Jewry by Hitler (without whose aid the Zionists would have gone the way of the Shakers and other utopian sects) and at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs, a settler colony was transformed into a nation.

Self-Determination for the Hebrew Nation?

This Hebrew nation came into existence through force and violence, through the suppression, forced expulsion and genocide of other peoples. Communists must oppose this brutal national oppression. Yet once this historical fact is accomplished, we must certainly recognize that nation's right to self-determination, unless we prefer the alternative, namely national genocide.

The United States itself (as well as good parts of Spanish colonial America) was created through the most brutal, and ultimately genocidal, despoliation of the native Indian population. The wiping out of the aboriginal population was almost total in Uruguay, Costa Rica and Cuba, for example. Should Marxists therefore deny the U.S.' right to self-determination, for instance during the war of independence in 1776? Do we deny this right to the Spanish-derived inhabitants of Latin America? Are we to deny Iraq's right to self-determination because it suppresses the Kurds; do we deny this democratic right to Nigeria because of the massacre of the Biafrans, or to the Sudan because the Arab north has wiped out hundreds of thousands of blacks in the south? Do we deny the right of self-determination to modern Turkey because it was forged over the corpses of one million Armenians and Greeks? The oppression and massacre of these subjugated peoples were great historical injustices, but this does not transform irredentism into Leninism. Rather, it underlines the necessity to view the

national question within the internationalist framework of the proletariat, recognizing that nationalism—the petty-bourgeois ideology which covers the expansionist and genocidal appetites of the bourgeoisie—is incapable of achieving social justice even on the terrain of bourgeois-democratic national rights.

The ex-Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party now denies the right of self-determination to the Hebrew-speaking people of Israel, arguing: "From the point of view of the Leninist concept of the right of nations to self-determination, the key fact is whether the given nationality is an oppressed nationality or an oppressor nationality" ("Israel and the Arab Revolution," 1971 SWP convention resolution). It is one thing to distinguish between the nationalism of the oppressors (which is wholly reactionary) and the nationalism of the oppressed (which, although it too is a bourgeois ideology that must be combated by socialists, is in part an expression of opposition to oppression). But Marxists do not pretend to sit with the gods on high, majestically rewarding the good but oppressed peoples with the right of self-determination and dispersing to the four corners of the world the bad oppressor peoples.

The SWP claims that Leninism recognizes only the claims of oppressed nations to the right of self-determination. This would have been news to Lenin! In his article, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" (December 1914) he approvingly quotes the resolution on the national question from the 1896 (London) congress of the Socialist (Second) International: "This Congress declares that it stands for the full right of all nations to self-determination..." To underline the point, Lenin goes on to remark: "The International's resolution reproduces the most essential and fundamental propositions in this point of view: on the one hand, the absolutely direct, unequivocal recognition of the full right of all nations to self-determination; on the other hand, the equally unambiguous appeal to the workers for international unity in their class struggle. We think that this resolution is absolutely correct..." [emphasis in original]

Under normal circumstances the self-determination of oppressor nations is of course not in question. The demand for self-determination for oppressed peoples means that they should have the same national rights already achieved by already established nations, not that oppressed peoples are

entitled to national rights while "oppressor peoples" are not.

By granting the right of self-determination to all nations, this does not mean that Marxists support the exercise of that right under all conditions. (Lenin compared self-determination to divorce; by recognizing the right to divorce one does not necessarily advocate dissolution of a particular marriage.) Further, when democratic rights come into conflict, it is necessary to subordinate the particular to the general. This was recognized by the then-Trotskyist SWP in 1948 in its editorial on "The Arab-Jewish War in Palestine" (*Militant*, 31 May 1948): "Haven't the Jewish people the right to self-determination and statehood as other peoples? Yes—but even if we abstract this question from its aforementioned social reality, the fact remains that they cannot carve out a state at the expense of the national rights of the Arab peoples. This is not self-determination, but conquest of another people's territory." The SWP vigorously opposed the UN Partition scheme and called for "a joint struggle against the imperialist oppressors on the basis of a revolutionary socialist program."

Self-Determination for Interpenetrated Peoples?

The SWP was, however, vague in its propaganda at the time, and tended to be unable to reduce its correct sentiments to a line on the war. This was not an accident, but flowed out of the complexity of the situation, the scarcity of hard information on the war itself (the bourgeois press' coverage being largely confined to hysterical propaganda about the plight of the poor beleaguered Jews) and the theoretical dilemma posed by attempting to apply the right of self-determination to interpenetrated peoples.

It was clear that the establishment of an independent nation-state, either by Palestinian Arabs or the Jews, would occur in Palestine only at the expense of the other nation. When national populations are geographically interpenetrated, as they were in Palestine, an independent nation-state can be created only by their forcible separation (forced population transfers, etc.). Thus the democratic right of self-determination becomes abstract, as it can be exercised only by the stronger national grouping driving out or destroying the weaker one.

In such cases the only possibility of a democratic solution lies in a social transformation. For example, the decomposition of the old multi-national Turkish empire precipitated a period of intensified murderous national conflict in the Balkans. The centuries of national hatreds and massacres between for example the Serbian and Croatian peoples exceeded the history of national strife between the Hebrews and Arabs in the Near East. The only basis for the unity of the Serbs and Croats (and other peoples) of Yugoslavia was the triumph of the partisan armies, against all of the nationalists, following World War II in a struggle which broke the bounds of capitalism and resulted in the creation of a deformed workers state in Yugoslavia.

Under capitalism, the right to self-determination in such a context is strictly negative: that is, against the abuses of national rights of either the Arabs or the Hebrew-speaking population. Thus, had there been an independent armed force of the Palestinian Arabs in the 1948 war, Marxists could have given it military support in the struggle against the expansion of the exclusionist Zionist state and the onslaught of the Arab League armies, which together suppressed the national existence of the Palestinian Arabs. Likewise, had there been an irredentist onslaught of the Arab states which threatened the survival of the Hebrew nation in Palestine, Marxists would have taken a position of revolutionary defensism of the survival of that nation.

Until recently the Spartacist League has held that the intervention of the Arab Legion following Israel's proclamation of independence transformed the

1948 war into a struggle to defend the survival of the Hebrew people and its right to self-determination. While opposing partition and fighting for the return of the expelled Palestinians, nonetheless we would have called for victory of the Hagannah over the Arab Legion.

The criteria by which we judge such a war have not changed. However, additional revelation of the circumstances surrounding the 1948 war through new factual material, much of which became available only recently, makes it quite clear that at no point in the 1948 war were the Arab armies in a position to challenge the survival of the Hebrew nation. In particular we call the readers' attention to the article by Y. Rad, "On the First Arab-Israeli War," in *WV* No. 35, 4 January 1974.

In light of this and other material, the SL Central Committee on 16 March adopted the following motion:

"The correct Trotskyist policy toward the 1948 Palestinian War was one of revolutionary defeatism (and exercise of self-defense by specific villages and settlements when under attack) because:

"1) the democratic issue of self-determination for each of two nationalities or peoples who geographically interpenetrate can only conceivably be resolved equitably within the framework of the proletariat in power;

"2) concretely in 1948—the Zionist-led Jews possessed the social/military organization to achieve and expand their own nation state. The Palestine Arabs were disorganized, ineffectual and betrayed on all sides. With the exception of the battle for Jerusalem, the Trans-Jordan (and British-inspired and backed) war aims were to compete with the Jews for the partitioning of Palestinian Arabs' lands. The role of other foreign Arab armies was essentially to posture, seeking to deflect discontent within their own states."

In 1948 the Revolutionary Communist League, Palestinian section of the Trotskyist Fourth International, while recognizing the right of the Jews to self-determination, resolutely opposed partition and took a revolutionary defeatist position in the Arab-Zionist war.

"This war can on neither side be said to bear a progressive character... It weakens the proletariat and strengthens imperialism in both camps. The only way to peace between the two peoples of this country's turning the guns against the instigators of murder in both camps" [emphasis in original] ("Against the Stream," reprinted in *Fourth International*, May 1948). Clearly, a re-examination of the historical evidence confirms the position held by the Trotskyists at that time—that the survival of the Hebrew nation was not in question. There were no effective forces fighting for the rights of the Palestinian Arab nation; none of the Arab forces fought for the national rights of the Palestinians or against imperialism, but rather against the Zionists and each other in order to carve up the Palestinian Arab nation among themselves and/or divert social struggle at home.

While the imperialist powers certainly had an interest in and intervened to shape the outcome of the conflict, it is not possible to consider the struggle on either side as anti-imperialist. Thus the Israelis were aided by the U.S. and the USSR (diplomatically and, at least indirectly, militarily), while the Egyptians, Iraqis and Jordanians all received British military aid. (On the other hand, not only the Israelis but each of the Arab countries involved was assiduously pursuing its own national aims, so that it is likewise impossible to reduce the war to a simple great power conflict.)

Marxists could give military support to neither side in the 1948 Palestine war. Our position for proletarian internationalism requires viewing that war from the necessity of revolutionary defeatism on both sides, counterposing to the victory of either side the perspective of united proletarian struggle, which offers the only possibility for the genuine fulfillment of the right of self-determination—through a socialist federation of the Near East. ■

Spartacist Local Directory

BAY AREA	Box 852, Main P.O., Berkeley, CA 94701	(415) 653-4668
BOSTON	Box 188, M.I.T. Sta., Cambridge, MA 02139	(617) 282-0866
BUFFALO	Box 412, Station C, Buffalo, NY 14209	(716) 837-1854
CHICAGO	Box 6471, Main P.O., Chicago, IL 60680	(312) 728-2151
CLEVELAND	Box 6765, Cleveland, OH 44101	(216) 651-9147
DETROIT	Box 663A, General P.O., Detroit, MI 48232	(313) 921-4626
LOS ANGELES	Box 38053, Wilcox Sta., Los Angeles, CA 90038	(213) 485-1838
MADISON	c/o RCY, Box 3334, Madison, WI 53704	(608) 257-0662
NEW HAVEN	c/o RCY, Box 1363, New Haven, CT 16505	(203) 624-7015
NEW ORLEANS	Box 51634, Main P.O., New Orleans, LA 70151	(504) 866-8384
NEW YORK	Box 1377, G.P.O., New York, NY 10001	(212) 925-2426
SAN DIEGO	P.O. Box 2034, Chula Vista, CA 92011	
TORONTO	(Committee of Toronto Supporters of the International Spartacist Tendency) Box 6867, Station A, Toronto, Ontario, Canada	