

SL Answers Palestinian Nationalist

Not Jew Against Arab, But Class Against Class!

In the most recent issue of the New Left/academic journal *Socialist Revolution* (April-June 1976) the Spartacist League/Spartacus Youth League comes under attack for its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Palestinian nationalist Fuad Faris, responding to a previous article in *Socialist Revolution* by "libertarian socialist" Noam Chomsky, singles out the SL/SYL position as the most "extreme attitude" within the American left placing "Arab and Israeli national rights in Palestine on an equal footing."

In his article entitled "To the American Left: A Few Remarks on the Palestine Problem and the Middle East" Faris prefaces his polemic against Chomsky with a denunciation of the SL/SYL position on the Near East. Demagogically insinuating "Eurocentrism" and Yankee arrogance, Faris indignantly cites "the slogan 'Not Jew Against Arab, But Class Against Class' (headline on the first page of the *Young Spartacus*, November-December 1973)" and then fumes about the allegedly "ridiculous" and "maximalist" slogan raised in *Workers Vanguard* (12 September 1975), "For the right to self-determination for the Palestinian and Hebrew nations—For a binational workers state as a part of a socialist federation of the Near East!"

Socialist Revolution seems to agree with Faris. In their introduction to his article the editors declare:

"His [Faris] response is directed not only at Chomsky but at other American socialists who, while condemning Zionism, maintain a stance of criticizing both sides equally. These socialists often argue that the Palestinian movement is 'bourgeois' in character, citing its cooperation with Arab states and its 'national' rather than socialist goals. They contrast the struggle between Israeli and Palestinian with a struggle of class against class. When *this* struggle takes place, they will take sides. But in the meantime, they maintain a position of criticizing both sides and supporting neither."

But neither the SL/SYL nor Chomsky criticizes "both sides equally." The bulk of Chomsky's earlier article, "Israel and the Palestinians" (*Socialist Revolution*, June 1975), is devoted to exposing and condemning the brutal national oppression and repression which the Palestinian Arabs have suffered over the last three decades at the hands of the Zionists. But Chomsky seeks to deal with a political reality which Arab nationalist apologists must deny: the Hebrew-speaking people of Israel also have national rights; to refuse to take account of these rights only perpetuates the deadly cycle of reactionary national wars in the Near East. Chomsky writes:

"ONE LAND—TWO NATIONS: that is the essence of the problem of Israel and the Palestinians.... It is a simple and pointless exercise to construct an argument to demonstrate the legitimacy of the claims of either side and the insignificance of the demands of its opponent. Each argument is convincing in its own terms. Each claim is, in a sense, absolute: a plea for national survival. Those who urge the demands of one or the other partner in this deadly dance, deaf to conflicting pleas, merely help pave the way to eventual catastrophe."

Indeed, given the counterposed national claims to the same territory by the Palestinian Arabs and the Hebrew-speaking people, the right of self-determination for either people can be exercised under capitalism only through denying that same democratic right for the other.

But Chomsky—lacking a revo-

lutionary proletarian perspective—searches in vain for some equitable resolution of this "conflict of claims to the same territory" within the framework of capitalism and imperialist domination. Reluctantly he opts for a "two-state solution"—yet another partition of Palestine and massive population transfers to establish separate Palestinian Arab and Hebrew states—recognizing that "both states, one must expect, will be based on the principle of denial of rights to citizens of the wrong category." Chomsky pessimistically concludes, "A solution imposed by imperial force is hardly to be welcomed, but it is not easy to conjure up a preferable and feasible alternative." At best, according to Chomsky, such a Cyprus "solution" may develop "towards a binational arrangement of the sort that was advocated by much of the Zionist movement until the Second World War."

In response Fuad Faris—unlike the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the "anti-imperialist" sheiks and generals ruling from Baghdad to Cairo—nominally concedes that the Hebrew-speaking people in Israel constitute a nation. But in the very next breath Faris denies that the right of national self-determination is applicable to the Hebrews. Disingenuously arguing that the Hebrews and Palestinian Arabs are *not* "claiming the same land to the exclusion of the other," Faris goes on to assert:

"It is wrong to bestow *equal rights* for self-determination on the Palestinian people and the Israeli people. Nobody has stifled the national life of the Israeli people for it to demand this right. Nobody has usurped this right from the Israeli people for it to be restored."

To be sure, in relation to the dispersed Palestinian Arabs, the Hebrews of Israel constitute an oppressor nation (although Palestinian nationalists such as Faris "forget" that in 1948 the Palestinian Arab nation was dismembered also by Transjordan and Egypt). But Leninists do not "bestow" democratic rights unequally, denying national rights as punishment for peoples that were compacted into nations through the oppression of other peoples and national minorities. The modern Turkish nation, to take only one example, was consolidated through the genocide and oppression of several million Armenians and Greeks in Anatolia, yet only the most virulent revanchist would deny the Turkish people their national rights.

In contrast to Faris, who declares that "this principle [self-determination] is *not* about 'the right to national self-determination of all nations,' oppressed or not," Lenin insisted that socialist internationalists, unlike nationalists, stand for the *equality of nations*: "We demand unconditional *equality* for all nations in the state and the unconditional protection of the rights of every national minority" (*Collected Works*, Vol. 19, p. 116).

It is demagoguery and slander to equate recognition of the national rights of both the Hebrews and the Palestinians with indifference to the struggle of the oppressed nation against national oppression. Far from "criticizing both sides and supporting neither" the SL/SYL has demanded: Israel out of the occupied territories, repatriation with full democratic rights for the Palestinians, full trade-union rights for all Palestinian Arab workers, and for

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the independence of trade unions from the state. To forge proletarian solidarity to uproot both Zionism and the bourgeois Arab nationalism promoted by the reactionary sultans and colonels, the Israeli Hebrew working class above all must recognize that its own class interests require that it wage an uncompromising struggle against the brutal national oppression imposed upon the Palestinians.

Although he criticizes the petty-bourgeois nationalist PLO leadership, Faris is led to give backhanded support to the reactionary Arab nationalists: "the Middle East conflict at the level of Israel-Palestine is above all a conflict between Zionism, embodied in the state of Israel, and the Palestine movement for national liberation" and *not* "essentially between national bourgeoisies that have enthralled the interests of their masses to their own." We deny Faris' assertion that the principal force on the Arab side is the "Palestinian movement for national liberation." The real military threat to Israel does not come from the Palestinian guerrillas, but from the Arab bourgeois states—primarily Egypt and Syria—whose motives have nothing to do with Palestinian national liberation. After Black September, after the Syrian action in Lebanon, Faris can scarcely expect his readers to believe that the wars of 1967 and 1973 were fought to achieve the national rights of the Palestinians.

Faris repudiates the class war and thereby rejects the only real road forward for the oppressed working masses of the Near East. Only the revolutionary transformation of property relations and the establishment of a binational proletarian dictatorship in a socialist federation of the Near East can provide the framework for the eradication of national oppression and the just resolution of the competing national claims of the Hebrew and Arab peoples. ■