

From "People's War" to the "Mini-State"

During more than a quarter century of Israel-Arab conflicts in the Near East, ostensibly Marxist tendencies have repeatedly failed to provide a program for unity between the Hebrew and Arab working masses. Instead, various "socialists" tailed after one or another currently popular bourgeois nationalist force.

Thus in the "six-day war" of June 1967 much of the left supported the "progressive" sheiks and colonels against Israel, in the name of a classless "Arab Revolution." Yet only three years later that well-known Arab "revolutionary," King Hussein of Jordan, unleashed a bloody attack on the refugee camps (the infamous "Black September" massacre) leaving thousands of Palestinian dead.

Following the ignominious defeat of the Arab regimes in the June war, the attention of petty-bourgeois radicals shifted to the nationalist guerrillas of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Being out of power—and with no prospect of soon getting in—the several commando groups of the PLO could afford more flamboyant rhetoric than their mentors in Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Kuwait. But, as demonstrated by its recent drive to acquire bourgeois respectability (acceptance of proposals for a West Bank "mini-state" and clamping down on commando actions), "pick up the gun" rhetoric has not enabled the PLO to give revolutionary leadership to the exploited masses of the Near East.

The "Militant" PLO

The Palestine Liberation Organization was set up in 1964, financed out of the coffers of the British-initiated Arab League, precisely to head off the development of an independent national movement in the refugee camps. Its founder, Ahmad Shuquairi, had been

assistant secretary-general of the League and later a member of the Syrian and then Saudi Arabian delegations to the United Nations—hardly the credentials of a revolutionary. King Hussein, who at the time held the West Bank and has consistently opposed moves for Palestinian independence, sponsored the meeting at which the PLO was formed.

It was the Arab defeat in the 1967 war that spurred the development of Palestinian commando groups, by discrediting the existing nationalist regimes and providing opportunities for guerrilla actions in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. By 1968 Shuquairi had been forced out of the leadership of the PLO. The largest and most moderate of the resistance groups, Yasir Arafat's Fatah, declared that the main strategy was "armed struggle," defined as "guerrilla warfare progressing toward comprehensive popular war of liberation" ("Program for Political Action," *Free Palestine*, April 1971).

According to Fatah, "exemplary" commando operations were supposed to "detonate" armed mass mobilizations on the scale of Algeria or Vietnam. But except for the single battle of Karameh on 21 March 1968, when Palestinian guerrillas fought Israeli troops to a standstill, "armed struggle" never progressed beyond isolated terrorist attacks.

Another indication of the PLO's "militancy" was its rejection of proposals for a "mini-state" which would accept the pre-1967 boundaries of Israel and abandon the 900,000 Palestinians living in Jordan, the 200,000 in Syria, the 300,000 in Lebanon and an equal number in Israel. The 1971 Palestinian National Congress declared its:

"Firm opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state on any part of the Palestinian Homeland on the basis that any attempt to establish such a

state falls within the plans to liquidate the Palestinian question."

—*Free Palestine*, April 1971

The PLO "Tamed"

That is precisely what the "mini-state" meant—both in 1971 and today: an attempt by the Arab regimes to rid themselves of hundreds of thousands of unwanted refugees, thereby eliminating a source of domestic political turmoil and a principal object for Israeli attack, by cramming them into the Judean hills. It will not solve the Palestinian question any more than the 1921 partition solved the Irish question.

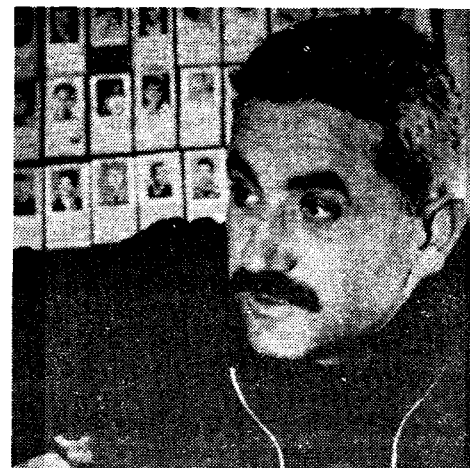
However, faced with the continued military impotence of the commandos (both against the Israelis and the butcher Hussein) and in the wake of the 1973 October war, which greatly strengthened Arab "moderates" around Faisal and Sadat, the PLO has dropped its opposition to the mini-state and is now talking of forming a government-in-exile. At the Palestine National Council meeting in Cairo this June, a "Transitional Program" of the PLO was adopted which supports a West Bank state as "a link in the chain of the strategy... to establish the Democratic Palestine state."

In addition, at the recent "Arab summit" meeting in Rabat, one of the secret resolutions was reportedly a pledge by the PLO to end public opposition to Hussein. In return the Liberation Organization was recognized as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people on any liberated Palestinian territory."

Since the granting of "observer" status at the United Nations to the PLO and Arafat's dramatic visit to New York last month, the resistance movement has sought to bolster its new-found respectability by clamping down on airline hijackings. That this is not a belated recognition that indiscriminate terrorism is actually di-



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From top: Yasir Arafat of the PLO, George Habash of the PFLP, and Nayef Hawatmeh of the DPFLP.

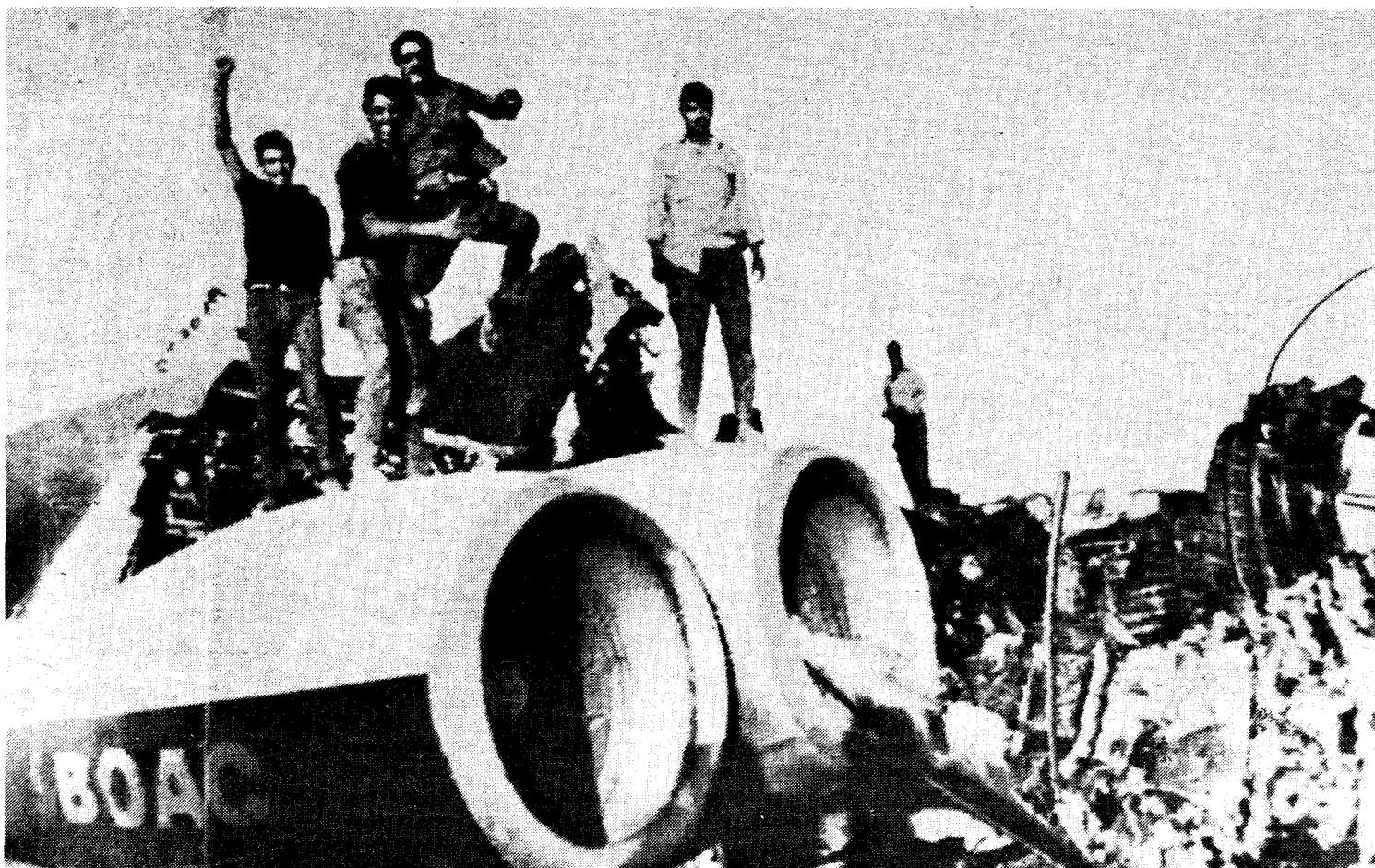
rected against the working people was indicated by the remark of one PLO official, explaining the "detention" of 26 people (presumably Palestinian commandos) in connection with a recent hijacking: "At the time we are gaining international recognition," he said, "we cannot allow mercenaries in our ranks to undermine our new stature" (*New York Times*, 28 November).

On the imperialists' side, this is exactly what is hoped for by those who support "Operation Mini-State." As French foreign minister Jean Sauvagnargues observed in justification for his visit with Arafat in late October, "The best way to distract people from violence and despair is to induce them to shoulder the responsibility on the international level, that is, to make them act in conformity with international realities" (*New York Times*, 13 November).

The Lessons of "Black September"

Hussein's 1970 massacre of three to five thousand Palestinian refugees and commandos was a watershed for the guerrilla movement. Fatah blamed "Black September" on the adventurist antics of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), especially his hijackings of airliners which were landed in Jordan. Arafat also condemned Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh's Democratic Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DPFLP), a left split from the PFLP, for provoking the repression by calling for the overthrow of Hussein. The correct policy, said Fatah, was "non-interference in the affairs of the Arab regimes."

The DPFLP, at the time the most left-wing expression of the resistance, drew many correct conclusions from the September tragedy, albeit never transcending an eclectic Stalinist "armed struggle" concept of two-stage revolution. Hawatmeh saw the weakness



Commandos pose atop wreckage. PFLP guerrillas blew up four hijacked airliners in September 1970. At one point they held more than 300 hostages at their "Revolutionary Airport" in the Jordanian desert.

of the Palestinian resistance in its acceptance of the reactionary Hashemite monarchy and the failure to raise "a democratic program for the rural areas (dealing with the land question, the struggle against feudalism, the big land owners and rural capitalism...)" (*September Counter-Revolution in Jordan*, November 1970).

The DPFLP denounced the policy of "non-interference" as rank opportunism in order to "benefit from the money and weapons of the regimes." Fatah's collaborationist perspective "resulted in the absence of a revolutionary programmatic alternative to the program which caused the defeats of 1967 and 1948," leading it to "give deeds of absolutism to the reactionary regimes for their handful of subsidies" and to "cover up for the programs of the nationalist regimes, which have been unable to attain the objectives of national democratic liberation."

The "mini-state" scheme, too, was denounced by Hawatmeh as placing "the

national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation, above all its peasant masses" (*The Permanent Revolution*).

Because the DPFLP could not find the road to a revolutionary proletarian perspective, it rapidly degenerated into the left-wing apologist and cover for Fatah. Since last year's October war, Hawatmeh has followed Arafat and Al Saiqa, a commando organization founded by Syria mainly to police refugee camps after the June 1967 war, into the fold of the Arab League and adopted the once-despised position of the "mini-state."

Marxism vs. Terrorism

As a consequence, "armed struggle" has degenerated into isolated and indiscriminate acts of terrorism, often directed against civilian targets, in order to garnish international publicity.



DFPARDON GAMMA

Palestinians in a position surrounded by the anvil of Israel and the hammer of the reactionary monarchy and imperialism" (*ibid.*).

Hawatmeh as Left-Wing Cover for Fatah

But the DPFLP proved unable to assimilate the most important lesson of 1948, 1967 and "Black September"—namely that "the main enemy is at home." This is true both for the Arab masses under the reactionary Hashemites or the nationalist colonels and for the Hebrew-speaking working people of Israel. The DPFLP never explained why the nationalist regimes were "unable to attain the objectives of national democratic liberation"—a correct empirical observation which could have been the beginning of Marxist wisdom, i.e., an understanding of the permanent revolution. Instead, it continued to envision some sort of "national united front" which would perhaps include some of the Arab nationalist regimes, and certainly the "progressive" Palestinian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, while excluding the bulk of the Hebrew workers except for a few "progressive intellectuals."

For the DPFLP, as for the rest of the commando groups, Zionism could never be destroyed by united class struggle together with the Israeli workers, but only from without, through a combination of commando terror, renewed Near East wars and diplomatic maneuvering. The DPFLP was unable to break with the myth, shared alike by Arab nationalism and Zionism, that the Hebrew worker is wedded to the Zionist state. Yet this myth is being shattered today by strikes on the docks of Ashdod and riots in the slums of Tel Aviv.

Most importantly, Hawatmeh and his followers failed to break with the "two-stage revolution" theory and find their way to the Marxist concept of permanent revolution (though they occasionally mentioned the words). For Trotsky it was the victorious working class that would bring national liberation of the colonial and semi-colonial countries: "the complete and genuine solution of their tasks of achieving democracy and

Thus a splinter group from Fatah, led by its former treasurer Abou Mahmoud, attacked a Pan American jet in Rome last December, killing more than 30 persons. And on April 11 three members of the PFLP-General Command entered an apartment in the small Israeli town of Qiryat Shemona and killed 18 persons.

Fatah has in the past itself condemned such indiscriminate terrorism. However, immediately after the Palestine National Council adopted the "mini-state" resolution (and its concomitant: national liberation through the UN and Geneva negotiations), Fatah took credit for its first operation of this sort. On the evening of June 24 three Fatah commandos entered an apartment in the Israeli seaport Nahriya and murdered a woman and two children. The purpose of this otherwise senseless act was to provide a "militant" cover for Fatah's rapid rightward motion.

Likewise, the DPFLP (prior to Ma'alot) had been critical of isolated acts of terrorism. This was one of the differences that led to the split between Hawatmeh and Habash. After the split the DPFLP wrote:

"Historically we find that reliance on individual action and terrorism was the solution of those who had lost faith in the potential revolutionary capabilities of the masses."

—*Al Hurriyah*, 2 March 1970

Quite true! And there is no doubt that Ma'alot was the desperate act of an organization that has lost faith in the revolutionary capacity of the masses.

In an interview with Paul Jacobs, published in the Israeli Zionist newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* (22 March 1974) Hawatmeh was quite explicit: he called for a "united, democratic state where Palestinians and Israelis will live together with the same rights and responsibilities" but added "we know that instituting the united democratic state is impossible in this period" (quoted in *New Outlook*, May 1974). As Jacobs pointed out in a later article,

"Since the DPF had not mounted any guerrilla actions for a long time it has been vulnerable to the accusation that it lacked militancy and courage. Hawat-



BALLANTINE BOOKS



هذا طريقي في الكفاح
فيا اخي اتمم كفاحي

TIME

Above: General Dayan, Brigadier General Narkiss (left) and General Rabin enter Old City in Jerusalem at Lion's Gate.

Far left: Palestinian guerrillas in training. Left: El Fatah poster proclaims—"This is the way to liberation of my homeland. And so, my brothers, I'll fight on."

meh's statement increased the pressure upon him; Ma'alot eased the pressure...."

—*New Outlook*, August-September 1974

The "Rejection Front"

The "mini-state" perspective and maneuvering to get delegate status at a renewed Geneva peace conference have been rejected by the PFLP, PFLP-General Command, the Arab Liberation Front and Popular Struggle Front. These groups have formed a "rejection front" which proclaims its fidelity to the old slogan of "revolution until final victory." In an interview (reprinted as a pamphlet by the Organisation of Arab Students under the title "Liberation Not Negotiation") with the Italian leftist paper *Il Manifesto* (29-30 January 1974), PFLP leader Habash stated:

"The danger of the Geneva conference... is that it weakened the Arab people's animosity toward U.S. imperialism and depicts the latter as a neutral arbitrator...."

"Hence the struggle of the Palestinian and Arab masses would be transformed from an anti-imperialist national liberation movement, into a limited nationalist fight for the regaining of some of the lost lands."

While the PFLP seeks to give the "rejection front" the image of a militantly independent Palestinian force, this is far from accurate. The PFLP-General Command is headed by former Syrian army officer (and graduate of Britain's Sandhurst) Ahmad Jibril. When in September 1968 the Syrian government arrested three PFLP leaders in Damascus, including Habash, Jibril refused to condemn the arrest and split from the PFLP. The Arab Liberation Front is simply a creation of the Iraqi Ba'athist Party. And all three—PFLP, PFLP-GC and ALF—are uncritically pro-Iraq.

Habash, who is more widely known for his hijackings and the Lod airport massacre (carried out by the Japanese Red Army in solidarity with the PFLP) than for his contribution to Marxist theory, has of late been making correct criticisms of the current Fatah-DPFLP strategy (just as Hawatmeh earlier made correct criticisms of the

Fatah-PFLP strategy). But while Habash claims to be a "Marxist-Leninist internationalist," his fundamental nationalism was revealed by a reply to a reporter of the German magazine *Stern*, who asked in 1970 whether PFLP hijackings might spark another world war:

"Oh yes. But let me assure you this does not worry us.

"The whole world would stand to lose something in such a war except for us. If that should be the only way to destroy Israel, Zionist and Arab reaction, we would in fact welcome the third world war."

—*Workers Press*, 18 September 1970

In view of the potentially genocidal consequences of such a nuclear holocaust, which could threaten the very existence of humanity, it seems almost too mild to quote Lenin on the question of Polish independence on the eve of World War I:

"To be in favor of an all-European war merely for the sake of restoring Poland is to be a nationalist of the worst sort and to place the interests of a small number of Poles above those of the hundreds of millions of people who suffer from the war."

—"The Discussion of Self-Determination Summed-Up"

A Bantustan for Palestinian Refugees

Indeed, preparations for the fifth Near East war are in full swing. Israel and Syria have put their troops on alert; Arafat, in his interview with *Time* (11 November), predicted war in at most six months. At the Rabat conference a joint military command was proposed comprising Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the PLO. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to rush arms to Israel and Russia continues to dump its most advanced military hardware into Syria and Iraq.

We have warned that yet another Israel-Arab war will not bring national emancipation for Palestinian Arabs, nor will United Nations/Geneva peace conference negotiations or a West Bank "mini-state."

The proposed West Bank state is, in fact, even less than the Palestinians were promised by the UN partition plan of 1947 and, if rumors of a secret Brezhnev-Ford deal at Vladivostok are true, would involve recognizing the Zionist state as presently constituted (*New York Times*, 29 November). Masquerading as recognition of the right to self-determination for the Jewish population, this actually means abandoning the 300,000 Palestinian Arabs living within pre-1967 Israeli boundaries to continued second-class citizenship and acceding to the results of Zionist conquest in 1947-49.

As to the results of another Arab-Israel war, we have shown elsewhere that in 1948, despite pious claims that they were fighting for the national rights of the Palestinians, the Arab League proceeded to gobble up whatever the Zionists failed to occupy. Syria carried off the El Hamma district in the Golan Heights, Egypt took the Gaza strip, and Transjordan transformed itself into the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan by absorbing the West Bank. In the latter case there was active collusion by King Abdullah with the Zionists to prevent the emergence of an independent Palestinian state (see "Birth of the Zionist State: A Marxist Analysis; Part 2/The 1948 War," *WV* No. 45, 24 May 1974). Neither in 1948, 1967 nor 1973 have the Saudis, Hashemites, Nasserites and Ba'athists fought for the liberation of the Palestinians.

In addition to becoming a "bantustan" for the dumping of unwanted Palestinian refugees and serving to legitimize the undemocratic partition of Palestine following World War II, a West Bank "mini-state" would necessarily become the client state of the reactionary Arab regimes. How much can be expected in the way of "aid" from the oil-rich sheiks in such an arrangement was indicated by the results of the Rabat summit: \$1 billion a year for Egypt and Syria, \$300

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... "Mini-State"

million a year to Hussein...and \$50 million annually to the Palestinians (*New York Times*, 30 October).

For an Arab-Hebrew Palestine Workers Republic!

At the same time that we advise against any "mini-state" scheme, we nevertheless defend the right of the Palestinians to set up their own government in Gaza and the West Bank as a partial and deformed application of their right to self-determination. We also demand unconditional and immediate withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories.

Revolutionary socialists would give military support to an independent Palestinian force fighting for Palestinian self-determination, so long as it is not simply an arm of one or more of the Arab states. But we oppose another confrontation between the Arab regimes and Israel—just as we have taken a position of revolutionary defeatism on both sides in the 1948, 1967 and 1973 conflicts—which might very well spillover to a third world war, even if after the holocaust the PLO flag flew over Nablus.

Another Arab-Israel war would once again reinforce the nationalists on both sides and undermine the revolutionary potential in the mounting social crisis in Israel and the occupied territories. What is needed is a multi-national Bolshevik (Trotskyist) party which could link the strikes in Tel Aviv, Ashdod and Haifa with demonstrations by West Bank Arabs against the Israeli occupation.

Recognizing the right of self-determination for both Palestinian Arabs and Hebrews, we point out that this can only be accomplished on both sides of the Jordan, including all of what now constitutes Israel and Jordan. These national claims, however, are directly counterposed, the product of historical interpenetration of two peoples on the same territory. Under capitalism another partition of Palestine, with its massive forced population transfers, can only bring untold misery to the working masses—as the Turkish army's partition of Cyprus graphically demonstrated in July.

Although the Hebrew nation is today an oppressor nation in relation to the Palestinians, a genuinely democratic solution would not simply reverse the terms of oppression. The "democratic secular Palestine" of the commando groups denies the existence of the Hebrew-speaking people as a nation—claiming they are simply a religion—and their right to self-determination. This is no different from the right-wing Zionist viewpoint which denies the existence of a Palestinian nation and its right to self-determination.

An equitable and genuinely democratic solution to the competing national claims of the Palestinian Arabs and Hebrews can only come about through the formation of a bi-national Arab/Hebrew workers state, part of a socialist federation of the Near East, born of the common class struggle of Arab and Jewish workers against their ruling classes. ■