

An Exchange of Opinion on

The Arabs, Israel and Zionism: Two Views

Comrade Gallienne, who sends us the letter below, is a French revolutionary socialist who has been living and working in Syria in recent times.—Ed.

To the Editor:

I have read various articles in LABOR ACTION on the question of Palestine. Since I have been living for four years in an Arab country, I think my opinion on this question may be of interest to you.

In the articles written by Hal Draper in reply to Maksoud [Aug. 23, 30] I think the question is badly posed. The author disregards its essential aspect: around 800,000 Arabs, peasants or urbanites, have been driven out of Palestine by the Zionist colonists and are living precariously in the neighboring countries. Is this just? Can any socialist movement approve of this? The answer is given that every person ought to be free to settle down in the country of his choice. Agreed. But on the condition that it is not for the purpose of colonizing it. The influx of foreign Jews into Palestine is nothing but a phenomenon of colonization. The ethnical make up of the country has been changed; a large part of the inhabitants have been driven from their lands to the benefit of people who have come from elsewhere and who have superior technical means at their disposal. Is it possible at one and the same time to disapprove of the expropriation of the black people of Kenya by the English, for example, and to approve of the expropriation of the Palestine Arabs by the Zionists?

You will reply that you condemn this expropriation. But then how do you reconcile this condemnation with the approval of the very existence of the state of Israel that can be read constantly in the columns of LABOR ACTION?

Hal Draper compares Israel to Libya and to Pakistan, and declares that wherever a religious or racial group wishes to form a state it has the right to do so. Agreed, as to the principle; but on the condition that a group occupying a definite territory is involved. Libya is based upon the equilibrium between Christian and Moslem sects in the midst of a Moslem country. Pakistan is the result of different concepts of life of Moslems and Brahmins. In India, as in Syria, socialists should, it seems to me, fight against these divisions and work for the union of the workers of all religious faiths. Nevertheless, when a religious group cannot understand the necessity of such a union, it has the right to form an independent state.

The case of Israel is entirely different. There you have people who have come from all over the world, installing themselves in Palestine in order to conquer a land that they did not occupy originally and to colonize it for the benefit of a religious or ethnic grouping, call it what you will.

It is vain to make a distinction between the state of Israel and Zionism. One doesn't go without the other, each supplements the other. The official doctrine of the country is the reassembling of all the Jews of the world into a single state, which cannot be effected without taking new lands away from the Arabs, thus achieving the program put forward by the extremist Zionists: an empire run-

ning from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The result is easy to understand: the hatred of the Arabs for the Jews is becoming an insurmountable obstacle in the East. To believe that this hatred is maintained by the feudal chiefs is to be gravely deceived. In reality, the Arab governmentalists, who make the distinction between Judaism and Zionism in their official declarations, very often show themselves to be more moderate than their peoples. If I have not noticed, since my arrival in the East, any anti-Jewish persecution (as a general rule, the Jew who is a citizen of the country is not hated; nonetheless he is looked upon with a certain distrust), I must add that on the other hand the hatred of the foreign Jews is complete, fierce, and the resumption of the war against the state of Israel would be extremely popular in all the Arab countries. This will give you an idea of the importance taken on by the army in the countries which feel their very existence threatened by Israelite expansionism, and the political role that the army has played or still plays in certain Arab countries.

Finally—this point is particularly serious for us—the support that the official socialist movement throughout the world has been giving to Zionism, the sympathy it has been showing toward it, repel the Arab masses from socialist ideas, impels them to look sympathetically toward the fascists, that is, toward their worst enemies. That is how it happens that some of the Nazi refugees are so attentively heard, or that the demagoguery of Franco yields fruit. There you have the fine results of the existence of the state of Israel.

What then can be the solutions to the Palestinian question? It is possible that in the long run the Arab governments, tired of the present situation, will accept a compromise, a "modus vivendi" (and not a genuine peace) which would record the accomplished fact? But that would not settle the situation to any extent and would not bring the Arab masses an inch closer to socialism.

What is needed is that the Arabs driven from Palestine shall be able to re-establish their homes and that they

shall not be treated like pariahs in their own country. That means that the state of Israel, whose very name indicates that it is exclusively the state of a religious grouping, should give way to a state of Palestine, which would belong to Arabs and to Jews without distinction. Palestine should be united; there should be an end to the sight of a city like Jerusalem cut in two by an uncrossable frontier (for the Judaeo-Arab iron curtain is harder to cross than the one separating the capitalist world from the Stalinist); and the country should then be free to regulate as it wishes its relationships with Transjordan. Such a program means the end of the Jewish immigration into Palestine. The Jews in the world who are seeking asylum ought to find it in the free countries or those that call themselves free. The United States, Great Britain, France should open their doors. Those who wish to leave Israel, where they have not found the life they expected (they are numerous) should be free to leave and to return to the country they came from. The Jews, Moslems and Christians of Palestine should enjoy the most complete political equality.

If these conditions were achieved, peace would reign in the Middle East and the Jews there would be looked upon as one religious grouping among others, without any animosity against them.

I believe that the position I defend is in conformity with the tradition of the international revolutionary movement. It is only after the war, out of sentimental reaction toward the Jews persecuted by Nazism, that certain groups of the extreme left wing revised their position on the Palestinian question (*Democratique Proletarienne* in France, *LABOR ACTION* in the United States). I am convinced today, after a long period of living in the East, that the revisionists are traveling the wrong road on this score, and that they must return in the interest of socialism to the revolutionary tradition opposed to Zionism and to the state it has engendered.

In all friendship;

J. GALLIENNE

Damascus, Syria, Sept. 21.

Reply: Is a Second-Round War the Solution?

1. Posing the Issue

Comrade Gallienne neglected his main opportunity to cast light on the Arab socialist position by not answering the central challenge which we presented to Maksoud. We pointed out that this Arab position of calling for the overthrow of the state of Israel meant a program to solve the question by war against Israel, for in no other conceivable way can "the very existence of the state of Israel" be eliminated.

Is this what Comrade Gallienne is for? (Not necessarily immediately, of course, but as the objective.)

This and nothing else—we said, and we repeat—is the essential programmatic difference between our solution and that of the Arab socialists.

If Gallienne is not for a "second-round" war perspective, how does he propose to do away with "the very existence of the state of Israel"?—since this seems to be the central question in dispute between us.

Against this program of overthrowing the state of Israel by Arab arms, we counterposed a political program: (a) transform Israel from a Zionist-Jewish state into a "binational" state, and (b) merge this state into a federated Arab-Jewish Palestine and a wider Near East Federation.—That's a 25-word partial summary of the program explained in the ISL's resolution and LABOR ACTION articles.

In sum: We differ from him in seeking to develop an anti-Zionist program which can save both peoples from internecine war; which in fact is an alternative to the war which the Arab socialists see ahead.

2. Anti-Arab Atrocities

Comrade Gallienne says that we disregarded the "essential aspect" of the question: the Zionists' expulsion of Arab masses from their land. He is grievously unjust. LA has carried reams of words denouncing the Zionist anti-Arab policy. It was not even in question in the discussion with Maksoud, being common ground.

The issue is: a program on how to fight the Zionist policy. If we do not go

sought. This we patiently repeated to Maksoud, and now to Gallienne.

Secondly on this point, we felt that the Palestinian Jewish community had the right to make the mistake they did (self-determining for partition). Comrade Gallienne says he would agree if "a group occupying a definite territory is involved." Well, we too stressed the territorial aspect four times in our article. That should have been enough.

Therefore we wrote in this clear context that "Israel has as much 'right' to existence as Pakistan." (Didn't mention Libya at all; don't know where that came in.) We are against the choice of communalist partition; it is a question of a national group's right to make what we (or Gallienne) consider a serious mistake.

We discussed in our article on Maksoud the point about the geographic origins of the Palestinian Jewish settlers. Gallienne's re-mention of the point does not add anything.

5. Arab Hatred of Israel

We do not doubt that this popular hatred exists among the Arab masses, as Maksoud adequately stressed. But what exactly follows for Gallienne?

Zionist anti-Arab hatred or hostility blankets the whole Israeli population also, workers and masses included. What follows for socialists?

Maybe the masses are right; we can argue that politically. But the fact of this hatred, and its fateful political consequences, should not overwhelm Gallienne. To Maksoud we directed the appeal that the Arab socialists play a *vanguard* role among the masses. It is not unthinkable that socialists should hold out against chauvinistic hatred among the masses. The same applies to Israeli socialists, those few who are ready to listen now. It is not necessarily a catastrophe for Arab socialism if it cannot join in with popular outcries. In the young Arab socialist movement, opportunistic trends are not absent; swimming against the stream might even be good for its soul. But this is not the way the question can be decided, by Gallienne or by us.

Socialist pro-Zionism, says Gallienne, repels the Arab masses from socialism. Granted. But are the Arab masses, or at least their best progressive elements, equally repelled by an anti-Zionist policy which does not call for destruction of "the very existence of the state of Israel," nor for solution by war? We know of objective evidence to the contrary; but if Gallienne insists even on this, then the Arab socialists have a harder row to hoe than we think.

6. Programmatic Planks

Gallienne's specific programmatic solutions, in his last part, are the best part of his letter, as we see it. Leaving out already-discussed disputed questions, they agree with our programmatic planks on (a) return and recompensation of Arab refugees; (b) reunited Palestine—we propose a federation; (c) freedom of emigration from Israel; (d) complete equality for all peoples. Such a program should also include many other planks which we have raised.

Hal DRAPER

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Editor: HAL DRAPER

Assistant Editors:

GORDON HASKELL, BEN HALL

Business Mgr.: L. G. SMITH