

International VIEWPOINT

Issue 156

February 6, 1989

£0.85; \$2; C\$2.75; 12FF

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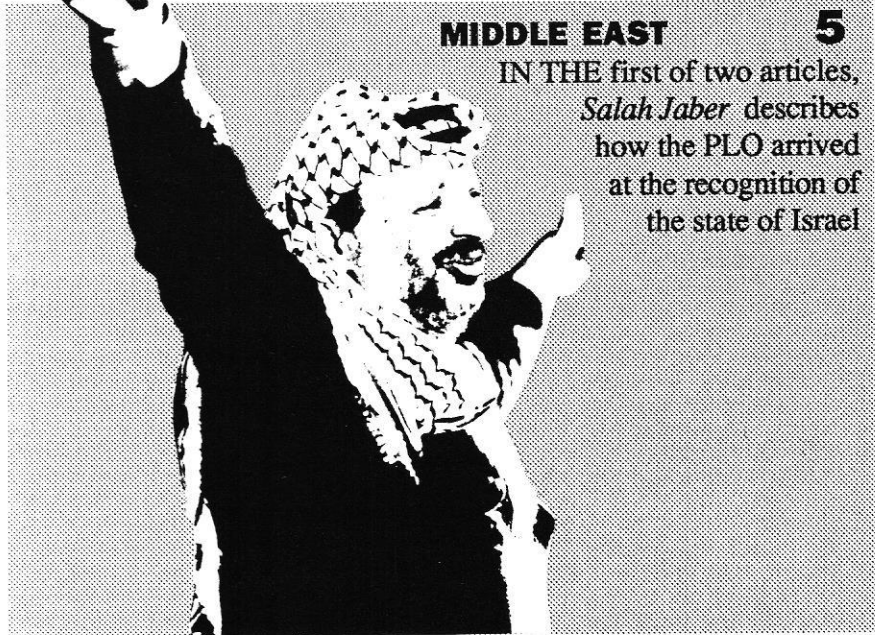
A fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in conjunction with the French language *Inprecor*, which appears on alternate fortnights.

All editorial and subscription correspondence should be mailed to: International Viewpoint, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.

Published by Presse-Edition-Communication (PEC). Directeur de publication: Christian Lemoine. Commission paritaire: 84324. ISSN: 0294-2925. Imprimé par Rotographie.

International Viewpoint is catalogued by the US Alternative Press Index.

- News closing date: January 30, 1989



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Moscow compromises with Estonians

THE ELECTIONS for the new Soviet parliament on March 26 seem to be shaping up in the Baltic republics into a serious test of the Communist Party's to ride the winds of liberalization. In one by-election already in Lithuania, a candidate of the local People's Front, Vaisvila, won 62% of the vote, leaving his Communist Party opponent with only 15%.

In an article in the January 26 *International Herald Tribune*, Michael Dobbs quoted the successful candidate as saying: "The party is panicking because they think they might lose." The Lithuanian CP chief, Algirdas Brauzaskas, whose appointment last fall had aroused great hopes, was said to be suffering from disillusionment created when he used this popularity to prevent the republic's parliament from falling in behind the demands for sovereignty raised by the Estonian legislature.

"That tactical success is costing him votes," Dobbs wrote. "In order to recoup the political ground lost to Sajudis [the Lithuanian People's Front], Lithuanian party leaders have now promised to support a totally revised version of the Lithuanian constitution, including the controversial sovereignty clause"

GERRY FOLEY

A LONG WITH Armenia, tiny Estonia has posed the sharpest challenge to the prevailing relationship between Moscow and the formally sovereign republics. Its example is particularly important for its neighboring Baltic republics, Lithuania and Latvia. The Estonian people number barely a million. They still constitute about 60 per cent of the population of the republic, and speak a non-Indo-European language closely related to Finnish, which Russians tend to consider unlearnable.

The Estonian parliament aroused a violent reaction from the central authorities by demanding the right to decide whether or not all-Union laws were to be applied in the republic and that Estonian was to be the language of the republic. It seems also that a considerable part of the Estonian language press slipped out of the control of the party authorities. Attacks on it were contained in an article by republic parliament deputy Koltakov in *Pravda* of November 26 ("Why I voted against" [that is, against

the sovereignty resolution of the Estonian Supreme Soviet]) and in one by the chief editor of *Eesti Kommunist* in *Pravda* of December 3.¹

For the moment, the confrontation between the Estonian parliament and Moscow seems to have ended in a compromise. The Estonian linguistic law adopted offered extra guarantees to Russian speakers. And on January 16 *Pravda*, for the first time, opened its columns to a direct answer to its attacks on representatives of national movements and national demands. It was a half-page article on page 3 by M. L. Bronshtein, a member of the Estonian Academy of Science. (In fact, the entire page was devoted to three articles on the question, putting Bronshtein's piece in the context of a general discussion of the problem.)

Bronshtein explained that the decisions of the Estonian parliament had to be understood as a means of maintaining the CP's political control.

"Now I want to take up the decisions of

the special session of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR, which caused such serious disagreements....Let us be frank, a series of points in the draft changes in the constitution of the USSR were seen by the majority of the population of the republic as a rejection of the sovereign status of the republics inscribed in the present constitution and the line of the Nineteenth All-Union Communist Party Conference on strengthening economic and political democracy....

"Justified fears of Estonian population"

"There was a rapid and strong reaction. And the Communist Party of Estonia would have been isolated from the overwhelming majority of the population, would not have fulfilled its task of consolidating all the healthy forces and isolating extremist elements raising the demand for separation from the Soviet Union, if it had not taken into consideration the justified fears of the population. In this extremely sharp and tense situation in the republic, certain changes were made in the constitution of the Estonian SSR to reinforce the sovereignty of the republic in the economic (primarily control over natural resources) and political spheres."

The sovereignty of the republics, he went on to explain, raised uncertain unresolved constitutional problems, which is hardly surprising because it has not existed in reality since the bureaucracy seized political power.

"Most of the disputes were tied up with the change in Article 74 of the constitution of the Estonian SSR, formulated as follows: 'Laws and other regulations of the USSR will go into effect on the territory of the Estonian SSR after being registered according to procedure established by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR.' This decision conflicted with the present constitution of the USSR. But here, I cannot fail to note the problems that exist. What is to be done if a disagreement arises between all-Union and republic organs? Not push the thing, as some irrational hot-heads proposed, to the point of threatening to leave the Union. Some constitutional form of reconciling the two is necessary."

Bronshtein responded to the outcry in the Soviet central press against the demands raised for limiting immigration into Estonia.

"Try to understand the psychology of the older population of our republic, the Estonians. The land on which their ancestors have lived for thousands of years has been threatened by ecological disaster (and the threat would have become a reality, if the corresponding all-Union minister had begun the planned phosphate mining). As a result of the extensive development of industry and the resulting importing of labor

1. See IV 155, January 23, 1989.

from various regions of the country, the specific weight of the Estonians in the population of the country has been declining, from 90% down to 60%. And if this trend continues, we can predict exactly when the older population will become a minority on their own territory. The range of the use of the Estonian language has been steadily declining. When the Estonian people decided to link their fate with that of the Soviet Union in 1940, they could hardly have expected these circumstances."

In this last formulation, it is hard to know whether Bronshtein was being deliberately ironic. Unlike the case of other republics, such as Ukraine for example, there was nothing voluntary about Estonia's union with the USSR. It was simply occupied. Resistance, real and potential, was crushed, resulting in the death, deportation or exile of one quarter of the Estonian people, mainly in the most energetic age groups. (References to this in the Estonian-language press are one of the things that have come under sharpest attack in *Pravda*, for example.)

Ecological threat from mining projects

The recent Estonian restiveness was sparked by a TV broadcast in the fall of 1986 that revealed plans for developing phosphate mines in the northern part of the republic. This scheme threatened to pollute the ground water in a third of the republic, a region inhabited by a 400,000 people. Oil-shale mining in Estonia for the benefit of Leningrad has already ruined large stretches of countryside and had a disastrous effect on agriculture. The ministry authorities at first denied the phosphate mining scheme, but as a result of *glasnost*, it was possible for the Estonian journalist Juhan Aare to get the facts out.²

Bronshtein explained: "It has to be understood that the tension that arose between the republic and all-union organs is not the result of some plot by 'bourgeois nationalists' or anti-*perestroika* forces (although they might make advantage of it for their aims)."

He chided the central press, especially *Pravda*, quite sharply for one-sided and tendentious reporting of the Estonian developments.

"In *Pravda*, as in the rest of the central press, the full text of the decisions of the special session of the Supreme Soviet was not published. Place was not found in the pages of the papers for an article by a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR explaining 'Why I voted for' (it was published only in the republic press). But in fact there were many more deputies who voted for."

This note in the high-priestly *Pravda* is quite startling. ★

Interview with Estonian writers

"We are not so extreme"

REPRESENTATIVES of the Estonian writers' union held the following discussion with Göran Jacobsson, a reporter for *Internationales*, paper of the Swedish section of the Fourth International, at the end of 1988.

THE ESTONIAN writers' union is a part of the People's Front, the most popular mass organization in Estonia. "We are something of a catalyst for the People's Front," Vladimir Beekman said. He was referring to a meeting that the writers' union organized last April 1-2. Journalists, architects, and in fact a large part of the Estonian intelligentsia, also participated in it. It is said that he was a Stalinist before. Today, however, he is a strong supporter of the People's Front.

The writers' union meeting demanded national sovereignty and economic independence. In the two following weeks, people constantly called the union to give their support and ask what they could do to contribute. On April 14, the People's Front was formed.

"It is the task of the intelligentsia to put forward this sort of demand, otherwise we would not be of much use," Beekman said.

Earlier, the relations between the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party and the writers' union were strained. Beekman explained that the CC is no longer trying to impose its view on the writers. To the contrary, more and more the CC is asking the writers' union for its opinion.

Vladimir Beekman has great confidence in Vaino Väljas, who was recently elected leader of the Estonian Communist Party. "Väljas was formerly a bit uncomfortable, since he was sent off to Venezuela and Nicaragua as ambassador. He has imagination and a positive attitude to change."

The writers' union has 188 members. Most of them live in the republic's capital, Tallin, or in the university city of Tartu. You can be a member if you have two books published. In Estonia, there is a long

series of subsidies for writers. Most of them are administered by the writers' union. "Half of our members live by their pens," Beekman explained.

There is a knock on the door of Vladimir Beekman's office. Jaan Kross, Teet Kallas, Paul-Eerik Rummo and Anu Saläär come in. Now nearly all of Estonia's most popular writers are present. We talk about freedom of expression. "We have expressed ourselves up to here. We have nothing more to say," says Paul-Eerik Rummo.

But they say that an article on Solzhenitsyn has been totally censored by the writers' union's own publication. This was the first intervention in a year. None of them can say what this censorship means. Is the situation tightening up?

None of them believe in the possibility of military intervention. "We are so flexible," Anu Saläär. "As long as the troops are in the Caucasus, there is no danger for us," Jaan Kross adds.

Paul-Eerik continued: "This is a different situation than in Poland. We have a centrist position. We are not so extreme. We are getting a hearing for our point of view throughout the Soviet Union."

"Of course, Stalinists and Brezhnevites are never going to accept us." Teet Kallas chimes in: "They will never voluntarily give up power."

"We have to wait until they are tired," snorts Jaan Kross. "Sclerosis is doing its job."

"Support for the People's Front is enormous"

"The support for the People's Front is enormous. In the Estonian republic, there are 1.1 million people qualified to vote. The People's Front collected 900,000 signatures in support of its program. Of these, 150,000 were non-Estonians resident in the republic."

"Russians and Russia are different things. Here in Estonia, we have six or seven democratic or pro-*perestroika* groups. In Moscow alone, there are over 300 groups that meet and discuss," Teet Kallas said. "They are more philosophical and not so active. They don't get anything done."

Freedom of expression is one thing. The writers' union is also demanding economic independence. The economic reality is quite another problem.

Some 90 per cent of industry in Estonia belongs to Moscow. The writers explained that the plants have their own workforces. They take raw materials from other parts of the Soviet Union and ship the finished products out of Estonia. "We have no need for such factories," they said.

"A commission came from Moscow to reassure us," Paul Eerik explains. "They said that 55 per cent of industry is going to belong to us and that 50 per cent of the income will stay here. They all laugh."

"It doesn't seem that we are going to get that." ★

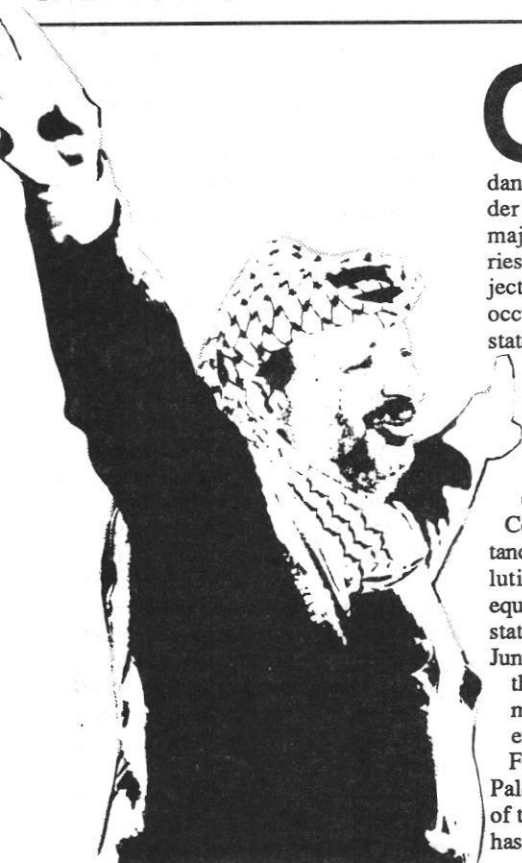
Where is the PLO going? (Part I)

The long march... backwards

ON NOVEMBER 15, 1988, Yasser Arafat proclaimed the "institution of the state of Palestine". The president of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) made his announcement at the end of the nineteenth session of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the broadest leading body of the PLO.

It came just three weeks before the first anniversary of the heroic and still uninterrupted uprising of the Palestinian masses in Gaza and the West Bank; it came also three-and-a-half months after the official renunciation by Jordan's King Hussein of any claim on the West Bank — a territory that his kingdom had annexed following the first Israeli-Arab war in 1948 and which was subsequently occupied by Israel in 1967.¹ The PNC's proclamation of the Palestinian state was doubly necessary.²

SALAH JABER



ON THE ONE HAND, this proclamation was necessary to fill the juridical vacuum created by the brusque decision of the Jordanian monarch. It was also needed in order to reply to the expectations of the majority of inhabitants in the two territories of the uprising, whose immediate objective is to free them from the Zionist occupation and to set up an independent state. However, although the proclamation itself was indispensable, it was accompanied by other decisions that were absolutely not.

The most remarkable was the explicit acceptance of Resolution 242 (1967) of the United Nations Security Council. This, coupled with the acceptance of the UN General Assembly's Resolution 181 (1947 — see box p.7), was equivalent to the recognition of the Zionist state in the frontiers established before the June 1967 war. This decision is contrary to the beliefs and sentiments of the vast majority of Palestinians in Palestine or in exile.

For the refugees — that is, most of the Palestinian people — expelled from 80% of their territory on which the Zionist state has established itself since 1948, the rejection

of such recognition goes without saying. But this view is equally shared by the vast majority of those living in the West Bank (of whom less than half are refugees from 1948). This was shown in a poll conducted among them on the eve of the PNC's last session³: 98.6% of those questioned approved the creation of an independent state of Palestine, but 78% said they were against the creation of such a state if the precondition for it was the recognition of the state of Israel.

So if this decision did not meet the aspirations of Palestinians, it nevertheless certainly replied to other expectations. Firstly, those of the reactionary Arab regimes, notably Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, who over the past few years have never let up the pressure for a move in this direction. Second, those of the Soviet bureaucracy, whose current chief was careful to make his counsels public during his meeting with Arafat in Moscow last April. Third, those of imperialist Europe, in particular the French government acting in concert with Mubarak's Egypt. And finally, and most importantly, the US administration who, after obliging the PLO leader to spell certain things out, considered themselves satisfied, and decided on December 14 to start a direct dialogue with the Palestinian organization.

A new and major political turn

Without doubt, the PLO has just made a new and major political turn. In order to measure its significance and consequences, it has to be situated in the long trajectory of which it is the outcome for the time being.

The PLO was created in 1964 by the first summit of heads of the Arab states, meeting in Cairo in January. In Jerusalem at the end of May that same year, the first session of the PNC was held, whose members were designated under the control of the Arab states. It was inaugurated by King Hussein. The PNC was then composed essentially of representatives of the bourgeoisie and notables, including religious figures. An army (the PLA) was founded, linked to the armies of each of the states where its brigades were constituted.

A National Charter was also adopted, reflecting the Palestinian and Arab nationalist consensus. It stipulated that "the partition of Palestine in 1947 and the creation of Israel have absolutely no validity, whatever time has elapsed since then, because they are contrary to the will of the Palestinian people and to its natural rights to its home-

1. In the second part of this article, which will be published in the next issue of *IV*, we will explain why the recognition of the state of Palestine by the world's governments should be demanded.

2. After 1948, the Gaza Strip passed under Egyptian administration without being formally annexed.

3. *Al-Hayat* (London), November 12-13. Published in the journal of the Sons of the Country Movement (Abna El-Balad), printed in Nazareth: *Al-Raia*, November 25, 1988.

land." On the other hand, this Charter excluded the Palestinian territories not occupied by Israel — the West Bank and Gaza — from the PLO's sphere of sovereignty. In the Charter, the liberation of Palestine was envisaged as the responsibility of "the entire Arab nation, governments and peoples, the Arab Palestinian people being in the front rank." Lastly, vis-à-vis Jewish inhabitants in the Israeli state the Charter only proposed a distinction between Jews of Palestinian origin entitled to live in Palestine and the others — that is, the overwhelming majority, for whom it offered no perspective.

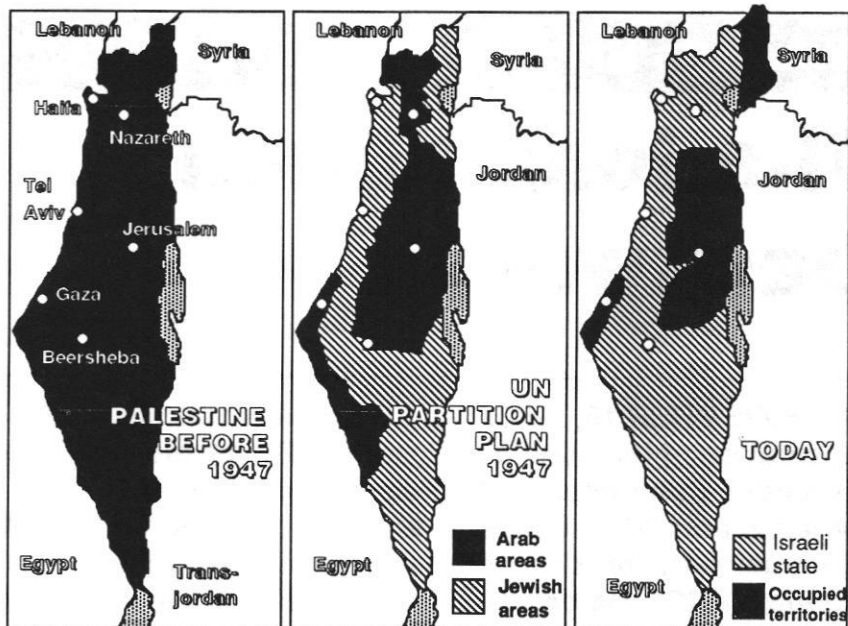
El Fatah profited from wave of radicalization

From 1964 on, however, the PLO was challenged by diverse Palestinian factions and by the left of the Ba'ath party.⁴ The criticisms they made, which were entirely correct, centred on two basic themes relating to the autonomy of the Organization. First was the method by which the PNC was designated, to which they counterposed the demand for direct elections by Palestinians of their representatives. Second was the nature of the PLA, in place of which they put forward the project of an army independent of the Arab states.

The idea of autonomous and immediate Palestinian armed struggle was concretized by a petty bourgeois group whose nationalism was strongly mixed with Islam, El Fatah. Launching its first commando raid against Israel on January 1, 1965, before all the other groups, it won a great deal of prestige. Such prestige that, when the Arab armies suffered their crushing defeat by the Zionist state in June 1967, El Fatah was the best placed to profit from the extraordinary wave of radicalization that swept the Palestinian people, extending to the young people in the countries where they were concentrated, as well as to the other Arab countries. It was under the pressure of this radicalization that, on September 1, 1967, the Arab Summit in Khartoum adopted the famous three "no's" in relation to Israel: "No to peace, no to recognition, no to negotiations". Less than three months later, Egypt and Jordan betrayed this triple pledge by approving UN Resolution 242.

Unable to contain the Palestinian radicalization, much less confront it, the Arab states set to work to take it over. Faced with the emergence of a far-left Palestinian current with the founding of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in November 1967, and a Ba'athist current, Egypt and Saudi Arabia chose to support Yasser Arafat's El Fatah. Egypt offered them control of the PLO, which was largely in its hands. Saudi Arabia started showering petrodollars on the Palestinian movement, which very quickly had at its disposal money that no liberation movement had ever dreamed of possessing.

6 The fourth session of the PNC, meeting



in Cairo in July 1968, amended the National Charter according to the wishes of El Fatah, so as to prepare the way for its integration into the PLO. The Charter was made more radical, but in terms of the ideological limitations of El Fatah: "The armed struggle is the only road for the liberation of Palestine". Now it applied to the whole of Palestine, including the West Bank and Gaza, all the more because these territories fell to the Zionist occupation in 1967. The accent was put on an "armed revolution" of the Palestinian people that the Arab states had a duty to support, notably by giving material aid.

Belief in a "democratic" solution

The nationalist maximalism that characterized El Fatah at the time shows up in the Charter's new Article 21 that "rejects all solutions substituting for the total liberation of Palestine". It combined with an explicit rejection of any inter-Palestinian class-struggle perspective, or of political struggle against the Arab regimes. This socio-political conservatism, a meeting ground between the bourgeois PLO and the petty bourgeois El Fatah, was the essential reason for the support given to El Fatah by most of the Arab states. "The PLO will cooperate with all the Arab countries", stipulates Article 27 of the Charter; it "will not intervene in the internal affairs of any Arab state".

On the eve of the fifth session of the PNC, in January 1969, El Fatah adopted a complementary platform that it got the PLO to ratify. It "categorically rejected" Resolution 242 and put forward, for the first time, the programmatic perspective of a democratic state "all the citizens of which, regardless of their religion, will enjoy equal rights". It was undoubtedly a step forward in relation to the Charter, but its

limitations were obvious: belief in the possibility of a "democratic" (bourgeois) solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question; of a solution in the limited territorial framework of Palestine (which meant, in the most generous hypothesis, the cohabitation of more or less equal numbers of Arabs and Jews in a Palestinian state); and, finally, a solution that only envisaged the Israelis as a religious community, ignoring the national character of the new society created in Palestine by Zionist colonization.

When the fifth session of the PNC met a month later in Cairo, it sealed the integration of El Fatah into the PLO, El Fatah taking the leadership with the blessing of the Arab guardians. It was the fusion of a petty bourgeois movement, in the process of bureaucratic and bourgeois degeneration under the impetus of a corruption accelerated by Arab petrodollars, with a bourgeois institution where the Palestinian bourgeoisie was largely and directly represented.

Organization closest to revolutionary Marxism

For a while, the PFLP, a left, petty bourgeois nationalist organization, refused to join the PLO, challenging its undemocratic makeup. Boycotting the PNC, where it had been offered some minor positions, the PFLP organized 40 mass meetings among Palestinians in Jordan, presenting them as so many "national councils". However, they ended up joining the PLO, while demanding that it be transformed into a parity front of the Palestinian armed-struggle organizations. Subsequently, and until this day, they demanded in vain that the PNC's composition be revised by taking into account the real representativity of its members.

4. This faction was ousted from power in Syria and repressed by Hafez El-Assad in November 1970.