

# International VIEWPOINT

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**HUGO BLANCO ARRESTED  
URGENT SOLIDARITY NEEDED  
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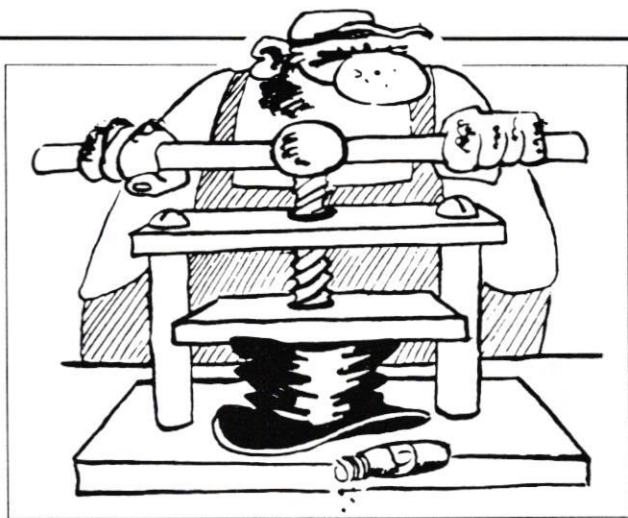
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# International VIEWPOINT

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## Where is the PLO going? (Part II)



# Questions of practical politics

**NOVEMBER 15, 1988, will go down in history as the day when the state of Palestine was proclaimed in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 — that is, on nearly 20% of Palestinian land.**

**But it was also the day when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) — created in 1964 as its name suggests to liberate the 80% of Palestinian territory which the Zionist state has forcibly settled since 1948 — officially accepted United Nations Resolutions 181 (1947) and 242 (1967). In other words, when the PLO recognized the Israeli state and its “right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries” on four-fifths of Palestine.<sup>1</sup>**

**SALAH JABER**

**A** FEW HOURS after the end of the last session of the Palestine National Council (PNC) on November 15, George Habash called a press conference. Habash is the head of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the main left faction in the PLO and the second largest Palestinian organization after Yasser Arafat's El Fatah. He explained to the press that his movement would stay in the PLO, in spite of its disagreement with the PNC's political resolution, in order “to preserve national unity”. Conscious of the weakness of this argument, Habash added that he was convinced that the new policy of the Palestinian right would lead nowhere, in any case. “Frankly, we no longer fear an American or Israeli settlement, because the ceiling of such an agreement cannot be accepted by any Palestinian, be they right or left”.

The pretext is threadbare. Fifteen years ago, the left of El Fatah used the same argument to justify its spinelessness towards a leadership who had *de facto* opted for a negotiated settlement with the Zionist state.<sup>2</sup> At that time, George Habash's PFLP argued against this pretext, withdrawing from the PLO's leading bodies in order to wage a political fight against the dominant bloc.

And here we are, so many years later, at the end of a sadly historic PNC that capitulated to American demands for the PLO's participation in a negotiated settlement process, with Habash using the same arguments that he fought previously, when the pretext was much more credible than it is today. But things should be judged on the evidence: what is the “ceiling” of a settlement from the standpoint of the US and

Israel?

First of all, from Washington's viewpoint. Ronald Reagan said in his speech/plan of September 1, 1982: “I ask the Palestinian people to accept the fact that their own political aspirations are inextricably linked to the recognition of Israel's right to a secure future....The best chance to arrive at a stable, lasting and just peace is to institute self-government for Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in conjunction with Jordan....The Arab/Israeli conflict must be resolved by negotiations leading to a deal: territories in exchange for peace.... UN Resolution 242 remains the cornerstone of the efforts made by America...”

### Understanding between Moscow and Washington

At the end of 1988, the floor of the PLO's positions, which had never stopped being lowered, had already essentially met this ceiling for a settlement envisaged by Washington. Admittedly, some nuances remained: the Reagan plan foresaw Palestinian “self-government” linked to Jordan, while the last PNC political resolution spoke of a Palestinian state (the term “independent” no longer appeared, as if by accident) in confederation with Jordan. Lawyers would appreciate the distinction. However, Jordan's King Hussein himself

had already resolved the debate by officially detaching the West Bank from his kingdom on July 31, 1988.

Is there then a disagreement on the framework of the negotiations, beyond the agreement on the principle of holding them? This is no longer the case, according to Arafat. He recently explained to the semi-official journal of his movement that an understanding had been reached between Moscow and Washington that the International Conference would meet in “ongoing” session and subdivide into bilateral commissions. (*Al-Yom Assabeh*, January 2, 1989.) The PLO chief made it clearly understood that he no longer considered there to be a divergence with the United States on this subject.

What about the certainly fundamental question of Israeli withdrawal? In the framework of Resolution 242, the American government has always been for an ex-

1. In the first part of this article, published in the last issue of *IV*, the trajectory of the leadership of the El Fatah/PLO was described, which had led over the past twenty years from nationalist maximalism to political capitulation before the United States and their Zionist protégé.

2. At that time, Trotskyists on the ground retorted: “The timescale of a ‘peaceful settlement’ could be brief or long, but it would be absurd to build a political line on the hypothesis of the impossibility of this settlement. Those who adopt such a hypothesis find in it a cosy pretext for undertaking no action against the ‘peaceful settlement’ or those who are preparing it”. (*Al-Mounadel* 30, Beirut, March/April 1975.)

change — peace against the territories occupied in 1967 — without ever specifying that the Israeli retreat must be total. In fact, Washington deliberately left the matter vague so as to be able to arbitrate in any eventual negotiations between Arabs and Israelis, as it did at Camp David. The 1982 Reagan plan limited itself to affirming that when negotiations took place the United States would be able to assess “to what extent it would be possible to demand that territories be relinquished [by Israel]”, depending on what was proposed in exchange.

### Fear of the Arab “demographic peril”

With Washington reserving the role of arbiter on this question of withdrawal, the ball was in Israel's camp. Enlightened Zionists, led by Labour Party head Shimon Peres, have always put themselves in the framework of Resolution 242 and its basic principles as defended by the US government. At the beginning of the 1970s, one of the big guns of Zionist Labour, Ygal Allon (who has since died), worked out a plan for a settlement with Jordan calling for an Israeli withdrawal from most of the West Bank. Some colonies and military bases were to be maintained at strategic points, notably along the Jordan river, which was considered as an inviolable security frontier for the Zionist state (the notion of “secure boundaries” contained in Resolution 242 lent itself to this sort of interpretation).

Since then, Labour's adherence to the principle of withdrawal (partial, of course) has been strengthened — not for “noble” reasons, but through fear of the Arab “demographic peril”. This fear, in turn, has been considerably boosted by the *intifada* (uprising), in which Peres has been able to see an illustration of his party's theses. On December 30, 1987, three weeks after the beginning of the uprising, he sounded the alarm. He publicly asserted that, in the year 2,000, “the entire population between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river (including the West Bank and Gaza) would be 45% Arab and 55% Jewish”, because the Arab birth-rate is “double ours”.

Two months later, Itzhak Rabin — the Labour Party's number two and, as minister of defence, the main person responsible for the repression of the uprising — made this confession: “During the last two months I have learnt... that it is impossible to govern a million and a half Palestinians by force”. (*Le Monde*, February 25, 1988.)

Indeed, outside of the heavy economic burden that this has meant for the Israeli state and the damage to its image in the world — two disastrous consequences for the Israeli “security” system — the *intifada* represents a direct and serious handicap for the Zionist army itself. It is mobilizing many thousands of soldiers to repress continually resurging mass demonstrations.

**4** The result is not only the “diversion” of a

considerable part of Israel's military potential, but also — and above all — a moral gangrene spreading through the ranks of the Zionist army. Although going back much further than the occupation of Lebanon (which ended in a quasi-debacle), the occupation of the 1967 territories has, in its turn, become more and more burdensome to maintain since the *intifada*.

So it is not surprising to note that the most passionate champions of a withdrawal are today to be found at the top of the Israeli military hierarchy. In March 1988, a group of retired Israeli generals (as such, free to act politically) founded the Council for Peace and Security. They included: Yariv, ex-head of Mossad (Israeli intelligence); Sneh, previously the administrator of the West Bank; and Orr, one time commander-in-chief of the northern region and, therefore, of the Israeli troops occupying Lebanon. Very quickly, the Council brought together more than 30 major generals and over 100 brigadier generals, altogether nearly half of Israel's retired general officers. Orr said: “We are all agreed in our estimation that the occupation must be ended because its continuation represents a worse danger to our security than its end”. (*Le Monde*, June 2, 1988.) A statement that is as clear as it is succinct. Sneh added: “Most senior officers, from Shomron (chief of staff) on down, would prefer a partial withdrawal from a demilitarized West Bank to Shamir's ‘Greater Israel’”. (*Newsweek*, June 6, 1988.)

Demilitarization and partial withdrawal: two key elements of Israel's “ceiling” for a settlement. Ben Gal, another member of the generals' Council, said: “We want a demilitarized West Bank; we want to keep control of its air space, have some electronic warning stations, a military presence on the eastern slope of the hills overlooking the river Jordan, which, in any situation, will remain the military frontier”. (*Le Monde*, 19 October, 1988.) As far as Gaza is concerned, the problem is much simpler: the sector is completely trapped between Israel, the sea and the Egyptian Sinai desert, itself demilitarized because of the Camp David accords.

### Different approach to Gaza and the West Bank

There is another major difference between the two territories. In Gaza, there are only around 2,000 Israeli colonists, compared to about 70,000 in the West Bank living in 124 colonies, and even the most “moderate” Zionists do not envisage dismantling all of them. These differences explain why Peres has several times come out in favour of a total evacuation of Gaza, while in the West Bank he only proposes a withdrawal from those parts “where Arabs are in a clear majority”. Ben Gal is more precise: “We could give up 100% of Gaza and 85% of the West Bank”.

Of course, there exists a large fraction of

the electorate and the politico-military establishment in Israel who reject even the idea of withdrawal. The Likud (right-wing bloc), led by Yitzhak Shamir, is clinging obstinately to the Camp David accords, which they interpret to involve granting administrative “autonomy” to the Arab inhabitants of the 1967 territories, while maintaining them under Israeli occupation. This position is, however, less and less tenable, not simply because of the *intifada* but also because it is totally isolated internationally. If Peres agreed to renew his governmental pact with the Likud in December, it was only as a stop-gap measure while he waited for the completion of the transfer of power from Reagan to Bush, after which the American administration would again be in a position to intervene actively. Then Shamir, who has already begun to water down his position, would be obliged to yield or hold new elections.

### Tanks and planes versus stones and bottles

Likud's argument — that if Israel “abandoned Judea and Samaria” (the biblical names for the West Bank), the result would place the security of the Zionist state in grave danger — took no account of the conditions laid out by Labour for a withdrawal. This is why it is totally meaningless. The US researcher Jerome Segal, Arafat's friend and counsellor and a strong advocate of a Palestinian state, replied to this argument as follows in *Newsweek* (September 12, 1988): “It's a total joke. We're talking about a pint-sized, demilitarized zone that has no access to the outside world except through two hostile and suspicious states that completely surround it — Israel and Jordan”.

The Israeli ex-minister of foreign affairs (Labour), Abba Eban, was in complete agreement in refuting the Likud theses. In the *New York Times* on January 2 this year, he compared Israel's resources with those of the PLO. On the one side, “3,800 tanks, 682 planes with an impressive bombing capacity, thousands of pieces of artillery and missiles, and a formidable electronic capacity”; on the other, “zero tanks or planes, a few guns and no missiles”, with “an assortment of grenades, mortars, stones and bottles”. Eban rightly concluded: “An entity run by Arabs in a large part of the West Bank and Gaza, or a separate state, or, preferably, in a confederation with Jordan, would be the weakest military entity on earth”.

Are the limits of Israel's “ceiling” for a settlement — a partial withdrawal and a demilitarization of the evacuated zones — unacceptable for the leadership of the El Fatah/PLO, as Habash said? Concerning the withdrawal, it is true that even the political resolution of the last PNC talks about “all the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967”. It is also true that when one gets ready to do a deal, one demands

the maximum. This is the case for all the Arab states, including Jordan and Egypt, for whom a total withdrawal is officially an inviolable principle.

## Will there be new Palestinian concessions?

But to the question "Will there be new Palestinian concessions if the International Conference meets?" the El Fatah/PLO's number two, Abu Iyad, who is usually more forthright than Arafat, replied as follows after the last PNC in the semi-official journal of the PLO: "Any solution that does not include a state is unacceptable.... After this, things become less complicated. Any negotiations will discuss practical questions, such as the definition of frontiers, relations and so on. Here I must remind you that all Palestinian soil is occupied. So if our leadership manages to rescue a section of Palestinian territory and proclaim an Arab Palestinian identity there, that would be very good." (*Al-Yom Assabeih*, November 28, 1988.)

The question of demilitarization is even less complicated. Resolution 242, now accepted by the PLO, already foresees "the establishment of demilitarized zones". And, secondly, the PLO leadership was itself the first to break the official Arab boycott of Egypt and establish a close coordination with the Mubarak regime, without demanding that the latter repudiate the peace treaty concluded with Israel in 1979, which was founded on the principle of the demilitarization of Egyptian territory evacuated by the Zionist army. Given all this, the Arafat leadership will have no trouble when the time comes in agreeing to let Israel impose a strict limitation on the categories of arms permitted in the West Bank and Gaza.

This, of course, does not mean limiting Palestinian armaments to kitchen knives. Demilitarization does not mean banning all firearms, even in Egyptian Sinai. Quite on the contrary, the Zionist state wants a situation where the authority that takes over in the zones it evacuates can assume "the normal functions of the police" (Egyptian/Israeli treaty), so as to guarantee that "no acts or threats of aggression, hostility or violence originate or are committed on its territory, or by forces under its control or stationed on its territory" (*ibid*). The authority that will replace the Israeli army, if ever they evacuate zones in the West Bank and Gaza, will certainly be authorized to have a police force equipped with light arms, as in the Sinai.

So, to pretend that the Palestinian right, after the last PNC, could not accept the Israeli/US "ceiling" for a settlement — to believe that after making their bed, they are

not prepared to lie in it — is to wallow in illusions. But beyond the illusory character of this moral comfort that George Habash is trying to wrap himself in, the real question, the one that he is trying in some way to dodge, should be asked: What are unacceptable concessions? What would really constitute treason to the Palestinian national cause and capitulation to Zionism and imperialism?

The answer does not lie where the PFLP chief seems to situate it: either in the partial character of the withdrawal or in the demilitarization. Let us start with the latter. Is there anyone who is stupid or naive enough to believe that after a possible withdrawal of its troops from the West Bank and Gaza, the Zionist state would allow the inhabitants in these territories on its flanks to possess missiles, planes and tanks as they pleased? Geographical considerations and the relationship of forces being what they are, only a decisive military defeat of the Zionist state — which is not on the agenda in the near future — could ensure the Palestinians unfettered sovereignty, even if only on a small part of their territory. So who could blame them for settling for — provisionally, of course — an Israeli army withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, while they do not have the means to replace it with a real Palestinian army? This would be to put off such a withdrawal indefinitely.

The same reasoning can be applied to the question of a partial retreat. As soon as the maximalist logic of "all or nothing" is challenged, as soon as

the necessity for tactical mediations and transitional objectives is affirmed, "all the West Bank or nothing" is no more valid than "all Palestine or nothing". It is evident that the masses of the *intifada*, whatever the scale and duration of their struggle, do not have the means to get more than a withdrawal of the Zionist army from the zones in which they are concentrated. To dislodge the Zionist colonies adjacent to, or outside of, these zones — and, with even more reason, the military bases — much more than an uprising is needed. What is needed is a war of movement, something that all the Arab armies put together are not in a position to win today, even supposing they had the intention to wage it.

It is therefore perfectly correct and legitimate that the Unified Leadership of the *Intifada*, in many of its communiqués since the early ones, has put up front what it calls "immediate" demands such as "army withdrawal from the towns, the camps and the villages". This same objective figures in Communiqué 26 of the Unified Leadership (see the last issue of *IV*), alongside the transitional objective of a complete withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, in the following formulation: "army withdrawal from Palestinian agglomerations".

## Not capitulation but revolutionary realism

Trying to obtain this objective through the struggle, in the knowledge that the evacuated zones will inevitably remain under close Israeli military surveillance, is not a capitulation but revolutionary realism. Realism, because this objective can be achieved through the *intifada*. The best proof that it is attainable is the mere fact that a decisive faction in the Zionist military hierarchy — under the pressure of the uprising and without being offered anything in return — has concluded that it is necessary, for security reasons, to withdraw the Israeli army from the Arab-populated zones — that is, from Gaza and most of the West Bank.

Of course, the incomplete liberation (limited sovereignty) of a small portion of Palestinian territory would be a very partial gain. In a manner of speaking, it would mean the inhabitants in these areas passing from a prison regime to house arrest. Such a gain would nevertheless be appreciable for those who are suffering the occupation. A revolutionary Palestinian leadership would be entirely justified in settling for this immediate objective, attainable through struggle, while continuing to fight under the banner of the transitional demand for a total and unconditional withdrawal of the Zionist army from the territories occupied in 1967. Such a leadership



would aim to transform Gaza and the inhabited regions of the West Bank in the short term into "liberated zones", administered by the "people's committees" born out of the *intifada*, which are giving the uprising its direct organizational expression.

But a partial gain — or anything resembling a compromise — is only legitimate from a revolutionary point of view if it is not in contradiction with the continuation of the struggle for the final objective. That it is, as Lenin said, a "compromise which in no way diminishes the revolutionary devotion and readiness for further struggle on the part of those who have agreed to such a compromise". (*"Left-wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder.*)

As a matter of fact, it is not enough to quote Lenin on the need for compromises, as do the Stalinists in Nayef Hawatmeh's DFLP. Account must also be taken of his warning against those who "imagine that it is sufficient to admit the permissibility of compromises *in general* in order to obliterate the dividing line between opportunism, against which we wage and must wage an irreconcilable struggle, and revolutionary Marxism, or Communism... It is important to single out from the practical questions of politics... those which reveal the principal type of impermissible, treacherous compromises, compromises embodying the opportunism that is fatal to the revolutionary class, and to exert all efforts to explain them and combat them". (*Ibid.*)

### Fundamental objective of self-determination

In the case of "practical politics" that we are discussing here, the impermissible compromise, the "treacherous compromise", is not, as previously explained, in the inevitably partial and limited gain available today to the Palestinians. The "treacherous compromise", the capitulation, consists in renouncing the "readiness for further struggle" in exchange for this gain — and, moreover, without any reason, at a time when the Palestinian struggle is at its peak. The "readiness for further struggle" to achieve the fundamental objective: for real self-determination for the whole of the Palestinian people through the destruction of the Zionist state, which is intrinsically founded on the oppression of this people. For the destruction of this state, which the preamble to the last PNC's political resolution itself still described as a "fascist, racist, colonial state, founded on the usurpation of Palestinian soil and the extermination of the Palestinian people!"

However, the text proclaiming the Palestinian state that was adopted unanimously by the same PNC, is based on UN Resolution 181 — that is, on the recognition of the legitimacy of the Zionist state — and "rejects the threat of force, violence or terrorism, or their use against its own territorial integrity... or that of any other state". The

political resolution, adopted by a majority of PNC votes against a small minority that included the PFLP, only dotted the "i's", given that the proclamation was equally based on "the international legitimacy embodied in UN resolutions since 1947".

These included not just Resolution 181, but also Resolution 242, explicitly accepted by the political resolution. It should be remembered that this means that the PLO is committed to cease "all claims or states of belligerency", to recognize the state of Israel and its "right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries, free from threats or acts of force", with "the establishment of demilitarized zones" in exchange for an Israeli withdrawal "from [1967] occupied territories" (without even specifying the extent of the withdrawal).

### A state under Israeli tutelage

In short, the PLO leadership has begun to implement the action plan advocated eight months previously by its US adviser Jerome Segal, mentioned earlier, in *The Washington Post (International Herald Tribune, May 27, 1988)*. The first steps in this plan are: 1) that the PLO proclaims the Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza — this has been done<sup>3</sup>; 2) that it turns itself into a provisional government — a measure that is postponed for the moment; 3) that it promulgates "law number one" proclaiming that "the Palestinian state declares itself at peace with the state of Israel" and "will not have an army"; as well as "law number two... banning all terrorist acts and instituting sanctions in the event of violations". The essence of these two "laws" is already contained in Resolution 242.

What makes the state that the PLO leadership is preparing to set up into a bantustan is not its size, nor even the fact that it will be under surveillance. It is the fact that it will be a state under tutelage, a state whose government will have as its main task the repression of any hint of Palestinians continuing the armed struggle against a state that has expelled the overwhelming majority of them from their lands at gunpoint.

The principal means for which the PLO has opted is entirely and exclusively adapted to this end. Indeed, nothing else can emerge from direct negotiations with Israel in the framework of an International Conference under the auspices of the big powers, which can only have Resolution 242 — worked out by these same powers — as its basis. It follows that, as far as the PLO leadership goes, the "treacherous compromise" is not an unlikely future hypothesis — as George Habash stated in self-justification after the last PNC meeting — but clearly a choice already made explicitly by the same PNC, and which had been implicit since the 1983 PNC (see the last issue of *IV*).

Is this to say that we should abstain from

demanding the recognition of the Palestinian state by those governments that have not already done so? Not at all, because the importance of this is its impact on the masses involved in the *intifada*. The majority of them only wanted to see the aspect of a "declaration of independence" in the PNC's proclamation. This is what they celebrated and what galvanized them.

Their demand for an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is just and has to be supported. Right now, one expression of that support is fighting for the recognition of this state by governments, immediately and without conditions of any kind, such as the "security" of Israel and so on. Because the more the masses of the *intifada* have the feeling that their hour of liberation is approaching, especially because of the growing international pressure on Israel and the US, the more they will be determined to continue their struggle without let-up.

However, as opposed to Moscow, which supported the proclamation of the state without recognizing it formally (for legalistic reasons), we fight for the formal recognition of the Palestinian state, though without approving the text of the proclamation adopted by the PNC. On the contrary, support for the struggle of the Palestinian people must remain, more than ever, centred around demands for a total and unconditional Zionist withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, and the right for Palestinian self-determination without any form of diktat. This orientation was reaffirmed in the statement on the *intifada* adopted by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in March last year (see *IV* 138).

### Support for the Palestinian masses in struggle

By maintaining clear political autonomy on this, with no equivocations, it is entirely possible and legitimate to participate in all activities giving objective support to the Palestinian masses in struggle, whether alongside the PLO and its unconditional supporters or even with Zionists and pro-Zionists opposed to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, especially in the imperialist countries and the Israeli state. At the same time, we must refuse to subscribe to any positions containing contradictory elements to those defined above, such as the "rights" of Israel, peace with Israel or the International Conference.

Likewise, today it is more harmful than ever to endorse the sacred formula "the PLO, sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people". Indeed, this formula is not just recording the result of an opinion poll (in the absence of any direct democratic mechanisms for representing the whole

3. This shows that even someone like Jerome Segal could envisage this proclamation well before the Jordanian king took the initiative on July 31.

of the Palestinian people). In the minds of those who invented it and as commonly interpreted, it is clearly a *carte-blanc* given to the PLO, and therefore to its leadership, to decide the Palestinian people's future in their name. At a time when the PLO has unambiguously embarked on the road of capitulation, the pernicious character of this formula can be measured.

## Most Palestinians live outside of 1967 territories

The US administration began having direct talks with the PLO last December, while a growing section of the Zionist *establishment* — including the current Labour minister Ezer Weizman, a quarter of the deputies of the same party and its general secretary, who just resigned for this reason — are calling for a direct dialogue between the Israeli government and the PLO. Was all this to celebrate the first anniversary of the *intifada*? Or was it because, between mid-November and mid-December, the Arafat leadership took some decisive steps in submitting to US and Israeli conditions?

It should not be forgotten that the majority of Palestinians live outside of all Palestinian lands, the West Bank and Gaza included. The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination includes also its right to freely and democratically choose its representatives, with nobody having the right to decree from the outside who is its "sole legitimate representative". Admittedly, the PLO enjoys the support of the majority of Palestinians — for the time being, because representation in a democracy is not an eternal right. The majority of the people can be wrong. Revolutionaries have the right, and the responsibility, to tell them and to combat their illusions.

To support unconditionally the struggle of an oppressed people against its oppressors means to support this struggle independently of the nature of its leadership (even if it is feudal or religious!). That does not mean unconditional support for such leaderships, especially when they belong to the possessing classes. In this respect, the attitude of revolutionaries must be based on the distinction between measures that should be supported and those that should be denounced.

For example, the unconditional support for the struggle of the Indian people against British imperialism had to be combined with a critical attitude vis-à-vis Gandhi and the Congress Party, in spite of their enormous popularity and the fact that they had led some struggles such as the campaigns of civil disobedience — very similar to those of the *intifada* in Palestine today. Many examples like this could be borrowed from other countries (China, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Iran, the Philippines and so on). But the history of Palestine itself is sufficiently eloquent. Up until the 1948 defeat, the only leadership followed by the large majority of Palestinians was that of

the Jerusalem *mufti*, Haj Amin Al-Husseini. He was the spokesperson of the great Palestinian *intifada* from 1936-39, and the person responsible for defusing it when he went looking for a compromise with the British mandatory authority at the expense of the Zionists.

In all confrontations between Zionism, the imperialist governments or Arab reaction on the one hand, and the PLO on the other, the PLO should be supported without a shadow of a doubt. On the ground, alliances should be made with the PLO against the common enemy. Thus, our comrades in Lebanon participated in the fight against the Lebanese reaction and the Israeli army for seven years, under the military leadership of the PLO. But it is necessary to know how to act with such an ally. As Trotsky said in relation to the left faction of the Chinese Kuomintang (which was much more radical than today's PLO): "Not by prostrating oneself before it at every one of its vacillations... supporting each step forward and relentlessly unmasking every vacillation, every step backwards". (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Stalin*, 1927.)

## Palestinian right-wing won prestige in 1960s

This latter task falls to the Palestinian revolutionaries and those in the Arab countries, whose most reactionary governments are the PLO leadership's main allies, supporting fervently every step backwards. Of course, the same does not hold true for the public activity of those active inside the Jewish masses in the Israeli state or the imperialist countries that support it.

That said, there remains an apparent con-

tradiction between our analysis of the PLO leadership and the fact it has enjoyed, up until now, widespread mass support. The contradiction does not come from the characterization of this leadership as bourgeois — a quantifiable and incontestable fact that the whole of the Palestinian left is agreed upon, including the Stalinist faction of the PLO. Because, after all, a bourgeois leadership can perfectly well embody the national aspirations of its people against a foreign yoke. The contradiction bears rather on our description of the PLO's trajectory in the last few years, if not since 1973, as a capitulatory course. George Habash, who shares the same analysis, quoted three reasons, in chronological order, to explain this apparent contradiction in a long interview/assessment given to the PFLP's paper, *Al-Hadaf*, in December 1987.

First of all, he said, was the fact that the Palestinian right had taken the initiative of armed struggle in 1965, which had given it a great deal of prestige and allowed it to win, in the beginning, a leading position. Following that was the fact that "the Palestinian bourgeoisie, because of its class nature and its tendencies to compromise and accommodate, is closely linked to the reactionary and bourgeois Arab regimes. These have given it a large amount of political and material support, which contributed to its dominance...".

Finally, still according to Habash, is the fact that "the national enemy replied to the political deviation that characterized the positions and practice of the Palestinian right by even more firmness and intransigence, such that the right-wing has appeared to follow acceptable tactics in the eyes of the masses".

These three explanations are true, if insufficient. The last one, which is absolutely

## Two Palestinian views of the PLO

**West Bank** — young militants of the *intifada* were met by Alain Gresh, special correspondent for *Le Monde diplomatique* (May 1988):

"Today, very little escapes their sarcasm, not even the PLO leadership that they loudly and vigorously proclaim is their 'sole representative'. At the same time in private they deplore its incompetence and the corruption of some of its cadres — 'the five-star PLO', they say, bursting out laughing, — its lack of success.... For Bassam in just a few months the Palestinians within have won more than the PLO in twenty years.... But their attitude to the PLO is unambiguous: 'It's the PLO that decides; they must negotiate; we refuse to set up an alternative leadership'."

**Jordan** — Bakaa, one of the biggest Palestinian refugee camps, visited by Véronique Maurus, special correspondent for *Le Monde* (February 17, 1988):

"The uprising... is felt as the expression of an authentic and fierce Palestinian self-determination, after years of manipulation by Israel, the Arab states, and even the PLO, which is clearly accused of impotence and collusion with the 'politicians'.... A dream is repeated endlessly: that a new leadership emerges from the revolution. Who? The replies are more discreet. 'There will be a revolution, here and everywhere where they oppress us', insists an old man. 'All compromises must be rejected. If the revolution is sponsored by the Arab governments or the PLO, it will come to nothing...'." ★