

Nahuel Moreno

On Palestine

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Contents

Introduction.....	1
Letter from a Chilean comrade	2
Palestinian democratic slogan that can pave the way for the workers' revolution.....	3
Israel, a Nazi state.....	8
Who oppresses, who is the oppressed?	9

Introduction

In our political and programmatic discussion with comrades from other organisations we have been asked why we raise the slogan of secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine, when not even the PLO has raised it for many years. Many of the arguments we hear match those of the Chilean comrade from the IWL–FI who in 1982 argued with the international leadership on the revolutionary program for the Middle East. Some international organisations of the Trotskyist movement not only have set aside the slogan that is at the centre of the debate in this controversy, but also they have abandoned the slogan of the destruction of the Nazi-Zionist state of Israel, inseparable from the previous, an issue we consider to be of vital importance in the program for the Palestinian struggle.

We reproduce three fragments of various works of Nahuel Moreno dealing with the topic.

Both “*Letter from a Chilean comrade*”, as the response by Nahuel Moreno “*Palestinian democratic slogan that paves the way for the workers’ revolution*” were published in *Correo Internacional*, year 1, no. 8 September 1982. Moreno polemised with a group of Chilean comrades who had left Lambertism and had incorporated into our current (then called IWL–FI). There we find an extensive characterisation of the PLO.

“*Israel, a Nazi state*”, published in *Primer Congreso Mundial de la LIT-CI (1985)* [First World Congress of the IWL (1985)], Ediciones Crux, pp. 123/4. In one of his speeches at the World Congress, Moreno referred briefly to the definition of the State of Israel.

“*Who oppresses, who is the oppressed?*”, published in *Conversations with Nahuel Moreno*, (English internet edition: www.nahuelmoreno.org/textos.php?i=en). In that question, Moreno answers his accusations of being “anti-Semitic”, defines Zionists as oppressors in Palestine and ranks Arab terrorism as a consequence of this brutal oppression.

Letter from a Chilean comrade

Santiago, 31 July 1982

Dear comrades,

This is in order to seek clarification on our line for Palestine. We rely on the Internal Bulletin 11 and *Correo Internacional* #7. Very briefly, our doubts are the following:

1. Why do we raise as central the slogan of a **bourgeois** “secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine”? Why are we for the construction of a **bourgeois** state in Palestine? We understand that if a state with such characteristics arises in struggle against Zionism and imperialism, we will **support** it, but it is unclear why today we claim it as **our slogan**.

2. Are we not making with this a concession to the reactionary ideology of “revolution by stages”, so dear to Stalinism and the petty bourgeoisie? If not mistaken, this was the central slogan of Stalinism and the Palestinian bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie until recently (as pointed out in *Correo Internacional* #7). Are we not saying the same thing as Stalinism when we propose that this Palestinian bourgeois state serve “as a step in the struggle for socialism” (Declaration of the IWL–FI)?

3. Why has it been deprecated what we believe is the classic slogan of Trotskyism for Palestine: Palestinian Constituent Assembly based on the destruction of the Zionist state? Why have we replaced this slogan we believe **transitional** by another that seems to us **minimal**— the bourgeois Palestinian state?

4. Is it enough the tactical criterion outlined in Internal Bulletin 11 — “**we take it up because the PLO abandoned it**” — to make ours a slogan that carries the betrayal that today displays the leadership of the PLO? Is it our method to pursue by the “left” the petty bourgeoisie and go picking up the spoils of the slogans it discards in the way of its capitulation to imperialism?

5. Why don't we even characterise the PLO in the Internal Bulletin? Isn't perhaps a front organisation controlled by the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie, with Arafat as an expression of this? Isn't an organisation that has given ample evidence of capitulation — in open contradiction with the incredible heroism displayed by the Palestinian people? Which are the “revolutionary” sectors that our press referred to? Hawatmeth? Habash? Isn't there an incredible illusion proposing in the Internal Bulletin to call the PLO “to take the leadership of the struggle of Palestinians in the path of socialism”? Do we ask the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie to “fight for socialism”? Isn't this gross blunder a way to “apologise” for the minimal central slogan on Palestine, throwing the idea of socialism beyond all practical and real contexts? Finally, is it not necessary to build a Trotskyist party in Palestine in the Middle East?

We do not want to pose as naive and inquisitive. The questions we raise reveal well that there are aspects of our line for Palestine that do not convince us. We were also surprised that the Zionist offensive was not linked with the military victories of the Iranian masses. It seems to us that imperialism gave the green light, particularly hard pressed to stop the Iranian revolution, to weaken Syria, Iran's only ally in the region and with a military presence in Lebanon. Therefore, in principle we deduce that the victory of Iran would be a tremendous boost to the anti-imperialist struggle in the area, very clearly, and therefore we do not understand the slogan that the armies of Iran and Iraq turn their weapons against Zionism. Most likely this will probably be the case **after** the military victory of Iran over Iraq and the fall of the Hussein regime,

perfect and concentrated expression of the Holy Alliance between the Yankees and Stalinism. Let us add, indeed, it seems the Ayatollah has halted the offensive in Iraq precisely to avoid having to go through Baghdad towards Jerusalem. The Ayatollah takes advantage of the pro-imperialist obstacle raised by the Iraqi regime to not be present in Lebanon. In brief, we think we have to call the **peoples** of Iran and Iraq to fight Zionism, but that now seems to happen through the fall of the Hussein regime in Iraq.

Naturally, we agree with the characterisation of the war in Lebanon, with the central anti-imperialist slogans, and in making our focus the destruction of the Zionist state. Needless to say, we will conduct the campaign. We have reproduced as a flier the Declaration of the IWL, and we are conducting talks on Palestine. The campaign has here a very propagandistic character. Later on we will inform with further detail, because the campaign was delayed for us unsuccessfully trying to make a united front with the PLO here. They still do not do anything except making pretty faces to government and “public opinion”, whose quality you can imagine in a country like Chile today.

Receive our fraternal greetings.

Palestinian democratic slogan that can pave the way for the workers' revolution

Nahuel Moreno

Dear comrades,

We have received your letter of 31 July with “summary” questions and implicit and explicit critiques to our positions on the Middle East. The key to our differences, even in what makes the method to address the problem, lies in your assertion that the policy and slogan of secular, democratic and non-racial Palestine are bourgeois and can only be supported “if a state with such characteristics arises in struggle against Zionism and imperialism”.

Moreover, our differences are further defined when, at the end of the letter, you state that “naturally” you agree with us “in the characterisation of the war in Lebanon, with the central anti-imperialist slogans, and in making our focus the destruction of the Zionist state”. Also, when you approve of our “focus” slogan of military support to the PLO and Syrian troops.

So as a first approximation the differences seem to be merely tactical. According to you, we completely agree on the “focus” and the “basis”, which would be the “destruction of the Zionist state”, and you mark your disagreement on what should be built “after”: for us, it would be the “bourgeois” slogan of a Palestinian state, secular, democratic and non-racial. For you, however, the slogan you consider “transitional” and “classic Trotskyism” is Palestinian constituent assembly on the basis of the destruction of the Zionist state. We will see that it is not so.

Who will destroy it?

In making this first question, logically derived from our principled agreement, the profound differences of method begin, which are then reflected in the policies and slogans. If the decisive and fundamental purpose is the destruction of the Zionist state, it is a matter of establishing what the objective forces currently engaged in this progressive, historical task are, and what the best slogans to support them and ensure that they fulfil their role with the greatest enthusiasm and strength are.

Perhaps the exploited and discriminated Sabras and Sephardim in Israel are doing it? Or is it Ashkenazi workers?

At this time, these forces are a stronghold of the Zionist state, not the vanguard of its destruction. The Ashkenazi labour aristocracy, through the Labour Party fully supports Zionism. The Sabras and

Sephardim gave Begin his electoral constituency and they enthusiastically support his plans of colonization of Arab lands.

This leaves at present the Arab and Muslim movement as the only social sector in constant struggle against Israel, whose undisputed vanguard are the Palestinians driven from their homeland by the Zionists. For 34 years, since the racist state was built, the way to fight for its destruction has been to support the just war of the Palestinians and Muslims. We see no other way, for there is no other power in the objective reality that confronts Zionism arms in hand.

As Trotskyists, we must then try to find the appropriate slogans for this objective reality, this is, that help the Arab mobilisation and combat. That is our method, but not yours.

Slogan for accomplishing the task or for after its completion?

When our methodological differences are embodied in various slogans, a new problem comes up of the function and the role they should play in the struggle. When and what for should we use a slogan?

If we are guided by your slogan, Palestinian constituent assembly, it is raised for after the “base” task is accomplished. It is not to help better fulfil the task but to solve a later problem, in this case, what would arise after the destruction of the Zionist state.

This is the methodology that Trotsky defined as dissolving the concrete into the abstract and futurological. Actually, you are dissolving the concrete, which is the Mohammedan and Palestinian fight to destroy the fascist, racist and based on the Old Testament state, into a futurological abstraction that, once the state is destroyed, you will call its current inhabitants, who are Zionists and have an absolute majority over the Palestinians, to a constituent assembly to discuss the reorganisation of the country, giving each of them a vote, same as the Palestinians.

We, instead, believe that the slogan should be at the service of the task, in this case, the destruction of the Israeli state. Not to give response to the problem after this destruction, but to implement it, to better mobilise the Palestinians. And let alone when the futurological abstraction is completely reactionary.

Your slogan does not help for the only present agents for the destruction of the Zionist state to have increasingly daring and courage, but undermines that purpose. The Palestinian constituent assembly slogan, consciously or unconsciously, today serves Zionism, temporizes with it and it is the reason why only Lambert raises it but not all Trotskyism and less the revolutionary kind.

The trap of shameful support

One of the basic problems of the war which, under diverse forms, has been developing for 34 years is the dispute over who has the right to remain in Israel. That is, whether the Zionists are going to stay or not, whether the imperialist enclave supported in the Jews will remain or be destroyed. The Palestinians say and fight so that the Zionists and the occupiers who came to strengthen the enclave, go away.

If the enclave remains, that is, if Israel wins the war, it could take different forms. It could get to assimilate a collaborationist Palestinian minority and allow them some rights, even, why not?, electoral rights. But if it is destroyed by the Palestinian war it will mean that the Zionists will leave Israel and, with them, those who give them their social and political base. This slogan— Zionists out of Israel! – is the decisive one, giving substance to our formulation of destruction of the Zionist state. There is no other way to destroy the Zionist state than throwing out the Zionists. What kind of destroyers of the Zionist state are we if our main banner is to allow the Zionists to win or participate in an election for a constituent assembly, by which we commit to fight with them and against the Palestinians, because the latter do not consider useful the Zionists vote?

The Palestinian constituent assembly after the destruction of the Zionist state is precisely the shameful way of supporting the Zionists and of validating their presence, giving a “democratic” veneer to their fascist usurpation.

If you want to suggest that this constituent assembly would be with non-Zionist Jewish settlers, we have implicitly answered before. These imaginary inhabitants do not exist. If the Jewish proletariat were to break with its Zionist apparatus (what we call), we should study the best way to connect it with the Palestinian struggle. But this is music of the future.

In your letter there is a theoretical error that leads you towards the slogan of constituent assembly, even though, as we have seen, it does not serve to mobilise Palestinians and it is pro-Zionist. You think it is “transitional”, therefore superior to ours, which is bourgeois.

That is false. It is a strictly bourgeois slogan, as bourgeois as ours. Neither has a single class element. The constituent assembly is a bourgeois democratic claim, not based on classes but on citizens. For each inhabitant, a vote. It is the epitome of bourgeois political rights.

Like any claim, regardless of its historical origin, it can play a traditional, progressive, regressive, and revolutionary or counter-revolutionary role, which depends on the context. For example, it is criminally counter-revolutionary in any colonial enclave, so imperialism tends to wield it to defend the enclave. We do not recognize any bourgeois democratic right of the people sent by the metropolis. When we occupy Guantanamo we will not call a constituent assembly with equal rights for Cubans and settlers from the base. Our slogan is, of course, Yankees out of Guantanamo, the same as we have in Israel.

In Israel today, the constituent assembly slogan is equally counter-revolutionary. We could only raise it ultra-propagandistically, and would be useless, preceded by a lengthy explanation saying that it will only take place if and when the Palestinians want it, when all Zionist, fascists, racists Jews who do not want to coexist with the Arabs have been thrown out of Israel.

If this is not properly clarified, or if it is dissolved in an abstract formula such as the destruction of the Israeli state, without explaining that this destruction necessarily implies the removal of its current inhabitants, the slogan means accepting the *fait accompli* of the Jewish occupation of Israel and saying that from now we will all be democratic, even the fascists.

Why does the leadership of the PLO abandon it?

In contrast, the bourgeois and non-classist slogan of a secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine, besides being the most progressive one raised by the Palestinian movement, can pave the way for the workers’ revolution. In another situation it might become counter-revolutionary, but today it plays a precise role, equivalent to Yankees out of Guantanamo or Zionists out of Israel, which is what the “not racist” part of the formula actually means. And this seems very good to us: that racists Jews be driven from Palestine. And tomorrow, also Arab racists. But tomorrow, not today. Because today Arab racism against Israel is progressive: it destroys the Zionist state.

So good is the slogan that, as the leadership of the PLO and the Arab movement become increasingly reactionary they drop it and, with it, the political line of destroying the state of Israel, to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state in some place of the Middle East.

We will be left alone raising the most heartfelt and advanced bourgeois democratic slogan of the Palestinian people. We are not taking a bourgeois or petty bourgeois “left-over”. We emphasize that the role of each slogan depends on the context in which it is wielded. In this regard, it is worth remembering the tactics Trotsky advised after Hitler took power. The “Old Man” advised to consider the possibility of raising the convening of the Parliament that elected Hitler, with which it would have been possible to try to get the petty bourgeoisie to break with fascism and join the proletariat, via parliamentary legitimacy. The same in Austria. As the working class there did not believe in workers democracy or proletarian dictatorship, Trotsky advised the line of defending bourgeois democracy with class mobilisation methods.

Just as an ultra-reactionary parliament, bourgeois democracy or constituent assembly may, under certain circumstances, become progressive or transitional slogans, we believe that in the Middle East, the bourgeois slogan that fulfils this role is that of a secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine.

The slogan also serves, to the extent that it is abandoned by the leadership of the PLO, to attack them like a boomerang and the same with all reformists who come to agree with imperialism, handing them the fight against the Zionist state. We appear as the only “consistent democrats” who are willing to use all means of struggle to destroy the State of Israel, imposing the great objective of the Arab masses.

What is the PLO?

Our methodological and political differences are intimately tied to those we also have regarding the overall characterisation of the situation and the PLO itself. When you write “if a State with such

characteristics (secular, democratic and non-racist) arises in struggle against Zionism and imperialism, we would support it; but it is unclear why today we claim it as our slogan”, you show you do not believe that there is already a secular, democratic and non-racist organisation at war with Israel and imperialism. However, its origin dates back to 1948 and it has consolidated since 1969 when the PLO was founded.

For us, the key to the situation of the Middle East is the war, sometimes declared, sometimes not, but permanent of the Arab movement and specifically Palestinian, against the State of Israel. This war has been expressed in various forms, globally or narrowly, with clashes between states, such as those staged by Egypt and other Arab nations, or with large and small guerrilla actions.

Of the various nations and nationalities in permanent war against Israel there is one, that of the Palestinians, that when they organised the PLO, formed this secular, democratic and non-racial organisation, vanguard of the war against Zionism. Do we support it now or wait for them to win the war, occupy Israel, retrieve its territory and thus re-form as a State, for only then support it?

If we did that we would support it when the war was ended, when our support would not mean anything and even when the slogan would lose its transitional character.

You characterise the PLO as just another political party. For us, it represents the Palestinian nationality as a sui generis secular, democratic and non-racist state organisation, in war. It is almost a state: it is a united front covering the entire Palestinian movement in struggle to regain their homeland and return to being a state. In fact it is a government: we call for its recognition just as we did for the FSLN in Nicaragua. It is an organised nationality that had their land taken away: when it recovers it, it will be a nation again. It is a sui generis nation.

When you deny this role of the PLO, considering it a mere fraction of Palestinian politics, you give a “left” foundation to the characterisation of imperialism. They also disown it as Palestinian national organisation, defining it as a terrorist organisation. Instead, they are willing to negotiate with Palestinian characters that nobody knows and eventually the Palestinian mayors of Judea and Samaria, because they collaborate with Israel.

Your refusal to acknowledge this sui generis character of nation without territory means that you endorse the Zionist and imperialist plunder of that country and accept they are right when they argue that, being expelled, the Palestinians were no longer an organised nationality.

Today, the organised Palestinian nationality has about five million people, divided into two sectors: those in refugee camps, led by the PLO, which are the majority, and the layer of professional, technical and, generally, well-off middle class, which is the most advanced in the Arab world, and serves mainly in Persian Gulf countries. They have not lost their Palestinian nationality — they are politically active or contributors to the PLO, which has offices and embassies in all Arab countries and many other nations.

The OLP and its government

Your sectarian characterisation of the PLO, in which you confuse its progressive totality with the fact that it has a treacherous, capitulatory or conciliatory leadership, produces several consequences. Firstly, with regard to its historical war, you resemble the sectarians who did not want to support Argentina against Britain, because Galtieri ruled it.

But neither are you capable of hitting their leadership for their actual capitulations that, in our view, are based on the abandonment of the slogan for a secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine.

Your criticism that we are deluded because we call the PLO to fight for socialism has the same root.

While this is not our fundamental slogan since, as it has been said, it is the recovery of the land, to rebuild the nation, expelling the Zionists and ending up constituting a secular, democratic and non-racist Palestine, our call to the PLO to struggle for socialism is based on considering it to be a sui generis nation. We say socialist PLO as we say socialist Chile. We do not ask their bourgeois or petty bourgeois leadership; just as in Chile we did not ask Pinochet. You forget to point out that careful, but systematically, as we do with every bourgeois government which directs a just war, we criticise the PLO leadership and we do not give them any political support.

The same confusion leads you to point out that we do not agitate for the need to build Trotskyist parties in Palestine and the Middle East. Of course, we must do it now! But the first thing to build them is a concrete program. We raise this program: PLO’s military triumph supported in the mobilisation of the

Arab masses against Zionism, to destroy their state and for the Palestinians to return, i.e. the PLO. That is the fundamental point. Along with it, to make the PLO to break with the bourgeoisie, i.e. a Palestinian State that breaks with the Arab bourgeoisies and practices class struggle. This is what we say systematically.

We can discuss which of the two poles of the program we should highlight, if the break with the bourgeoisie or the destruction of the State of Israel. We think that if we want to work on the Palestinian and Arab masses, the one we have been doing is paramount: the common front of struggle against the Zionists, within which we demand a new leadership. With this orientation we work and want to work in the PLO. It seems the most appropriate, strictly speaking, the only one, to build, with its best fighters and its most exploited sectors, the revolutionary party.

Israel, a Nazi state

I want to touch in passing Israel. First to make a self-criticism: Israel is not a fascist state but, in the sense that we define it, it is Nazi. Nazism provides methods of civil war, not only against the proletariat but also against races, especially the Jewish and Slavic races. It is one of the highest monstrosities of imperialism.

I do not want to devote myself to the historical problem, that Nazism potentially has shown what is the future of humanity if capitalism triumphs. From the point of view of the monstrosity, the Nazi dynamics is brilliant because it is an attempt to transform the exploited in different species, in different races. The monstrosity of capitalism, in that sense, aimed perfectly well. In human monstrosity there can be no more: the attempt to divide humanity in sectors that will end in different species, some working and others living at the expense of the other. To this end there were the methods of civil war against races, not only against the working class [...]

We know perfectly well that the working class of Israel, especially Ashkenazi (i.e., Jews of European origin), are not persecuted, we know they have Histadrut (Trade Union Confederation), they have everything. [...] What we denounce is that there is a systematic genocide of racial type. This is typical of Nazism more than of Fascism. So I criticise myself.

We did not appreciate the depth of this we have now learned. Also one of the greatest Israeli jurists, member, if I remember correctly, of the Supreme Court, said that Israel was Nazi. We changed and said it was fascist, without grasping how deep it was. He understood better than we did, and he knew that even as a member of the Supreme Court he could afford the luxury to say that Israel was Nazi, he was free to speak. He was right; it was Nazi in this sense: the methods of civil war against a race. Where a race is persecuted with methods of civil war, there are Nazi methods, because they are methods of civil war.

Well, comrades, that is all.

Who oppresses, who is the oppressed?

You draw a parallel between Nazism, apartheid and Zionism. Have you ever been accused of anti-Semitism for it?

Yes, the Zionist left accuses me of anti-Semitism, especially as I argue that the destruction of the Zionist state is needed.

As a Marxist, I start from the base that the proletariat of a nation which exploits and oppresses another, as Israel do to Arabs and Palestinians, cannot be liberated. The Jewish working class is heir to a glorious tradition of class struggle: the road of the Western proletariat, including the Argentinian, is strewn with a multitude of heroic Jewish fighters. But this proletariat cannot continue to the end, or to grow green again and exceed its glorious tradition until they get on the side of the Palestinians and the Arabs, who are repressed, persecuted and enslaved by the State of Israel. Genocide is a constant of Zionism, from the early years until the recent invasion of Lebanon and the massacre in the camps of Sabra and Shatila.

Calling us anti-Semites is a trap for the unwary. It's like saying that a German who wanted the defeat of Nazi Germany was anti-German, or someone who wants to sweep the Boer republic off the map because it is anti-black, is a racist because he is against the Boer farmers.

The question to be answered with regard to relations between peoples, races, nations and classes is very simple, I would say too simple: who oppresses, who is the oppressed? For a revolutionary Marxist the answer is as simple as the question: we are against the oppressors and for the oppressed. We defend to death the latter, while noting, when needed, their leadership mistakes.

Arab terrorism is an aberrant tactic, totally wrong, and so we say. But we continue beside the Palestinians and Arabs, defending these fighters although they use aberrant and monstrous tactics that go against the interests of their people.

What is essential for us is that this terrorism is born out of desperation of the Palestinians youth living in conditions similar to those of the Nazi concentration camps. Look at the photos of the inhabitants of these areas: they have the skin attached to the bones. They show the same state as the survivors of the Buchenwald and Auschwitz camps when they were liberated at the end of the war. The culprit is the State of Israel, supported, unfortunately, by its people; as the Nazi state, during its early years, had the support of most of the German people. Never mind that these camps are within or without the borders of Israel, its existence is due to the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland.

The similarity between the Boer State and Nazism is obvious. The Nazis not only persecuted the left but also used the most brutal methods of civil war against other races, mainly against Jews. We have always fought in the front row against all expressions of Nazism and will unconditionally defend the Jews.

When one belongs to an oppressing race or nation, struggling against a nation or nationality oppressed, if one is a consistent revolutionary Marxist, one is for revolutionary defeatism. The lesser evil is the defeat of one's own country or nationality. Lenin favoured the Russian defeat in the Russian –Japanese War and in World War I, and for this he was called a traitor, anti-Russian, racist, German agent. And our comrades fighting the Zionist Jews are called traitors, renegades, anti-Semitic, for opposing the oppression and genocide of the Arabs and the Palestinians by the State of Israel.

Racial oppression in Israel and South Africa is a modern expression of Nazi barbarism; it shows once again that where there is capitalism, Nazism is just around the corner if not stopped by the mass movement.

And even without going to the monstrous extremes of Nazism and its younger brothers, Zionism and apartheid, the economic development of capitalism itself leads to cases of North Eastern Brazil and India — dwarfism, progressive and cumulative stultification.