

*Horowitz*

September 22, 1970  
New York

To: Members of the Political Committee

From: Bob and Berta Langston

Dear Comrades,

It is evident that there are differences within the party on some questions connected with the Arab revolution.

At a PC-initiated meeting between some members of the PC, comrades involved in Middle East work, and Arie Bober, Barry indicated that he strongly disagreed with some of our views.

An article by Bober, originally solicited for the ISR and based on a talk he gave at the New York Militant Labor Forum, was refused for publication when he declined to delete certain paragraphs. Those paragraphs expressed views we generally agree with.

There has been a good bit of informal discussion of these questions. At the Oberlin conference, the discussion became rather heated, and a number of comrades asserted that some of our views are contrary to the party line.

On a number of occasions, we have expressed these views to people outside the party, with the explanation that they represent personal opinions consistent with the party's position, which has, however, never been explicitly formulated in any document.

We request that the PC issue some kind of clarifying statement, indicating either that these views are consistent with the party's position or that they are not. In the event that the PC finds them inconsistent with the line, we request an explanation of how they deviate.

The disputed questions pertain to the definition of the status of the Israeli Jews in a revolutionary program for the Middle East. In our opinion:

- 1) The process of the Zionist colonization of Palestine has produced an Israeli-Jewish nation which is distinct both from world Jewry and from the specific capitalist-Zionist society and state that exist today in Palestine; the overthrow of imperialism in the region and the smashing of the Zionist state will place on the agenda the task of integrating this nationality group into the region -- unless the Israeli-Jews are so nearly physically annihilated as to become incapable of social organization;

2) A basic principle of proletarian democracy -- the appropriate political form of societies in transition from capitalism to socialism -- is the right of nations to self-determination, where this phrase means simply the right of a national group to secede from some larger, multinational state and form a separate state and where this right, it is understood, is subordinate to the defense of proletarian power; acknowledgment of this right by workers' states is a precondition of a nonoppressive, nonantagonistic integration of national minorities into the regions where they live.

From these premises, we conclude that a revolutionary program for the Middle East should include, as one aspect of the call for a socialist Middle East, the recognition of the right of the Israeli-Jewish nation to self-determination within the context of a Middle East in transition from capitalism to socialism.

We believe this point should be made explicit in the formulation of such a program. Usually, the national existence of a nation that is today an oppressor nation is not placed in question by the struggles of oppressed nationalities for their liberation. Neither the struggle of the Vietnamese people, nor the Black struggle, nor any other struggle against U.S. imperialist national oppression, for example, objectively places the national existence of the American (or Anglo-American or whatever the correct term may be) people in question. Nor has any spokesman for any of these national liberation movements called the national existence of this people into question -- the exceptions are at least very few. The establishment of an independent Black state on territory now part of the United States might involve considerable involuntary transfers of the white population; it would not place their national existence in question. Whites' anxieties in this matter lack every rational foundation; they are nothing but expressions of chauvinism.

The situation is quite different in the Middle East. The region is and will remain demographically an Arab East. A unified Arab nation is on the historical agenda; despite all obstacles, it will be achieved, and one of the prime tasks of the Arab revolution is precisely to achieve it. The Israeli-Jews will remain a small minority in an Arab region. Objectively, the emerging Arab nation, having begun to overcome its fragmentation and social and economic backwardness, will sooner or later be able to destroy or to oppress the Israeli-Jewish nation. This will be avoided only if the revolutionary transformation of the Arab East assumes a form that precludes the development of new, nationally oppressive relations.

The majority of the revolutionary forces in the Middle East today deny the reality of Israeli-Jewish nationality. Although most of the Palestinian fedayeen groups have explicitly rejected the "throw the Jews into the sea" perspective, the Palestine National Charter, as amended in July 1968, still provides that only Jews living in Palestine "until the beginning of the Zionist invasion" are Palestinians and thus have a right to remain in the land. Of the Palestinian guerrilla organizations, only the Democratic Popular Front recognizes the Israeli Jews as a national group; even it, however -- inconsistently, it seems to us -- is explicitly opposed to the perspective of the Israeli-Jewish right to self-determination in a Middle East in transition from capitalism to socialism.

In short, the Arab national and revolutionary movements at present place the national existence of the Israeli Jews in question both objectively and subjectively.

This is not, we believe, merely an abstract matter. Again and again, not only in Israel but also here, the question is raised now: "What about the Jews in a liberated Palestine?" Partly the question reflects Jewish or big-power chauvinism vis a vis the Arabs. Partly, however, it is based on an accurate perception of the social and political reality, and it demands respect. There are, it seems to us, only two answers that have credibility.

One is that the fate of the Israeli-Jews is a matter of indifference to revolutionaries, that because they are today national oppressors they can have no claim to consideration in the formulation of a revolutionary program. This position constitutes a departure from the traditional revolutionary insistence that masses are not responsible for the crimes committed in their name by their leaders and rulers. It makes sense, it seems to us, only if the totality of Israeli-Jewish society is regarded as an undifferentiated colonial establishment or a mere U.S. imperialist mercenary apparatus. This conception denies -- falsely, we think -- the reality of fundamental class differences within Israeli-Jewish society; it denies that the Israeli-Jewish workers have a real class interest antagonistic to the class interest of their Zionist rulers and identical with the real class interest of the Arab masses.

This answer implies renunciation of the effort to split the Israeli-Jewish masses from Zionism. It implies renunciation of the effort to break through the dilemma that today confronts the Israeli workers: either adhere to the Zionist rulers that exploit you or renounce your national existence. It thus implies a wasting of the immense potential offered by the development of a mass, revolutionary, anti-Zionist movement within Israel for hastening the day of triumph of the Arab revolution.

In the Arab countries, this answer implies renunciation of the effort to transform the intense, spontaneous, mass national sentiment -- including the pervasive, elemental and completely comprehensible Jew-hatred associated with it -- into conscious revolutionary struggle against imperialism, Zionism, and Arab capitalism and feudalism. For this transformation can be accomplished, surely, only by mobilizing the masses around transitional demands and actions -- including, under the proper circumstances, armed struggle against the Zionist state -- while at the same time conducting propaganda, as well as educating a cadre, in the spirit of proletarian internationalism. This answer thus implies leaving the Arab masses vulnerable to the same kind of chauvinist demagogues who have so often in the past sold their countries -- quite literally, in the case of Palestine -- to foreign exploiters or colonizers while mouthing the most supernationalist slogans.

In the United States, this answer means abandoning to Zionism millions of people -- Jews and non-Jews alike -- who have an historically deep-rooted, perfectly legitimate and nonchauvinist concern about the Israeli Jews, and who could otherwise be won over in varying degrees to support of the Palestinian and general Arab anticolonial, anti-imperialist struggle.

The only other credible answer to the question, "What about the Jews in a liberated Palestine?" it seems to us, is that the Israeli Jews constitute a nation that, once the Zionist state has been destroyed and the oppressive relations vis a vis the Arabs have been abolished, will have a legitimate claim to full national rights, including the right of self-determination. This answer, we believe, implies for the task of advancing the world socialist revolution all the positive features corresponding to the negative features of the other answer.

"In between" answers, we think, lack consistency and hence credibility. Affirmation, for example, of Israeli-Jewish rights to develop the national culture, to speak Hebrew, to maintain Jewish schools, etc., is simply not believable if it is accompanied by the denial of a right to construct an instrument to protect those rights -- that is, a state -- if the people involved feel it necessary.

The assertion that recognition of the Israeli-Jewish people's right to national self-determination is a necessary element of a revolutionary program for the Middle East does not, of course, imply in any way that support to the Palestinian national struggle -- or any other objectively anti-imperialist struggle in the region -- is contingent on adoption of a correct revolutionary program by the movements or states involved. Today revolutionaries must unconditionally support the Palestinian national struggle, simply on account of the dynamic of permanent revolution, just as they did during the great rebellion of 1936

to 1939 when -- unlike today, fortunately -- the Palestinian movement was under the hegemony of a corrupt, land-owning, religious chauvinist who was in the process of withdrawing his services from Great Britain and offering them to Germany.

Nor, of course, does assertion that the revolutionary program for the Middle East must include recognition of the Israeli-Jewish right to self-determination in a Middle East in transition from capitalism to socialism imply that "self-determination for the Israeli Jews" can be raised in any form whatsoever as an immediate or transitional demand. The Israeli Jews today have a state -- of a kind that cannot be tolerated by the Palestinian and other Arab masses. It is logically meaningless to raise such a demand; and just because it is logically meaningless, its rhetorical or emotional meaning can only consist in an appeal to Jewish chauvinism, much as the slogan, "White Control of the White Community" can only consist in an appeal to white racism. It would constitute a real concession to Zionism.

As an element of a revolutionary program, the concept of Israeli-Jewish self-determination pertains exclusively to the status of Israeli Jews after the destruction of the Zionist state and the abolition of the oppressive relations vis a vis the Arabs in an Arab East in transition from capitalism to socialism. By being made explicit today, however, it can help to overcome doubts and anxieties and illusions that are nevertheless rooted in an accurate perception of social and political reality. It can add depth and intensity to an uncompromising ideological struggle against Zionism in all its forms.

This is a rough outline of the views some comrades regard as incompatible with the position of the party. We therefore ask for clarification.