

DRAFT MEMORANDUM ON THE MIDDLE EAST

October 15, 1970

The central role played by U.S. imperialism in attempting to contain the Arab revolution places special obligations upon the SWP to mobilize opposition to Washington's imperialist aims and actions in the Mideast. This necessitates our having a clear line on imperialism, Zionism and the state of Israel and the dynamics of the Arab revolution. The following is a general outline of the line our press has been following and should continue to follow:

1) We give unconditional support to the national liberation struggles of the Arab peoples against imperialism. That is, we support all these struggles for democratic demands regardless of their current leaderships. Our foremost task in concretizing such support is to mobilize the American people against U.S. imperialist actions in the Mideast.

2) Israel, created in accordance with the Zionist goal of establishing a Jewish state, could only be set up in the Arab East at the expense of the indigenous peoples of the area. Such a state could only come into existence and maintain itself by relying upon imperialism. Israel is a settler-colonialist and expansionist capitalist state maintained by imperialism, hostile to the surrounding Arab peoples. It is an imperialist beachhead in the Arab countries, and is the spearhead of imperialism's fight against the Arab revolution. We unconditionally support the struggles of the Arab peoples against the state of Israel.

3) The source of the oppression of the Jewish people in this era is the capitalist system, which in its period of decay carries all forms of racist oppression to the most barbarous extremes. This was horribly illustrated in the holocaust directed against the Jews of Europe by German imperialism under the Nazi regime.

Cynically utilizing the crimes of the Nazis as a pretext, the imperialists and Zionists created the state of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians, who had nothing whatsoever to do with the Nazi crimes. Portraying the victim as the criminal, imperialist and Zionist propaganda attempts to falsely equate the Palestinian goal of national liberation with the genocidal

actions of the Nazis. One of the factors enabling the imperialists and Zionists to do this has been Western racism against Arab peoples.

We have always warned the Jewish peoples of the world: Zionism leads you into conflict with your potential allies -- the oppressed of the world and has allied you with your worst enemy -- imperialism. Imperialism in its death agony has led to one holocaust against you already; it will do so again unless it is overthrown in time.

4) The principal victims of the creation of Israel were the Palestinians -- i.e. the Arabs who inhabited the region where Israel was established, who have been driven from their homes or placed in subjugation within Israel and the other "occupied territories" (those territories most recently occupied). The Palestinians are a part of the Arab peoples, but they are also a distinct national grouping, with its own history of struggle against imperialism. There were Palestinian uprisings in 1921, 1929, 1933 and 1936-39. At the height of the 1936 rebellion, the people of Palestine engaged in a 174 day general strike. Being driven from their homeland by the creation of Israel greatly intensified national feelings among the Palestinians. The upsurge of Palestinian nationalism we have seen in the recent period, especially after the 1967 war, was particularly marked in the refugee camps and newly occupied territories and is a result of the special oppression these peoples have suffered at the hands of Israel. The recent events in Jordan have further intensified Palestinian national consciousness.

The struggle of the Palestinian people against their oppression and for self-determination has taken the form of a struggle to destroy the state of Israel. The current goal of this struggle is the establishment of a democratic, secular Palestine. We give unconditional support to this struggle.

Part of our program for the Palestinian revolution and the Arab revolution as a whole is support of full civil, cultural and religious rights for all peoples in the Mideast, including the Israeli Jews. It is to the credit of the major Palestinian liberation organizations that they also advance this concept, and view it as part of their attempt to win the Israeli Jewish masses away from support to the Israeli state.

5) In the epoch of imperialism, neither the Palestinians in particular nor the Arab peoples in general can fully realize the goals of their struggle for national liberation, national economic development, or other democratic tasks except through the process of permanent revolution. These democratic tasks

can only be fully realized and guaranteed by the working class at the head of the toiling masses, chiefly the peasantry, in a revolution against the imperialists, their Israeli agents, the Arab national bourgeoisie and Arab feudal remnants. This revolution will combine democratic and transitional demands and lead to the creation of a workers' state. This proletarian strategy implies unconditional support for the implementation of the democratic tasks. The national bourgeoisie, whether "progressive" or "conservative," cannot lead the struggle for national liberation and democratization to victory, but instead limits and diverts it.

6) To lead the struggle for national liberation to completion through the process of permanent revolution, the creation of mass revolutionary socialist parties is absolutely essential in both the Arab countries and Israel.

7) Unfortunately, such parties do not exist anywhere in the Arab countries or in Israel. At the present time only a few Trotskyist cadres exist in those countries. In Israel, a small group of Trotskyists work in the Israeli Socialist Organization, a heterogeneous grouping yet to be won to political support of the Fourth International and Leninist organizational concepts. In Europe and North America a promising development has been the winning of a number of Arab cadres from different Mideast countries to the Trotskyist movement.

None of the various Palestinian liberation organizations meets the criteria for such revolutionary socialist parties, either in theory or program or organization. However, among these groupings fighters have appeared who show potential for political development. The best of them are to be found in the major Palestinian liberation organization. The recent events in Jordan demonstrate that the Palestinian liberation organizations have deep ties with the Palestinian masses. An important and hopeful sign is that Stalinism did not succeed in attracting, holding or shaping the major Palestinian liberation groups. It is from among the cadres of these groupings that we can expect to find the best possibilities for the formation of a nucleus of a revolutionary socialist party.

At the present time, given our limited information and the lack of political clarity among the Palestinian groups themselves, including about the politics behind their splits and organizational differences, and the fact that it is not yet clear that any one of these organizations has become the

decisive leadership of the Palestinian struggle, it would be premature for us to give any one of them special support over the others. A step forward has been the cohesion of the united front among the Palestinian organizations during the Jordanian civil war. We should maintain an attitude of general support to the Palestinian struggle and to all the main struggle organizations, of course with full freedom to present our views on program and tactics.

8) Although one of the goals of the Arab revolution will be the unity of the Arab peoples, we cannot approach this program schematically or formally. Historical developments plus the role of imperialism have created separate Arab states and differences among the Arab peoples. The revolution will therefore unfold in an uneven way in the region, and can leap ahead or suffer setbacks in one or another of the Arab states, including Palestine. We foresee the establishment of a united socialist Middle East. But this will not issue from a simultaneous and uniform revolution throughout the area. At present, the Palestinian struggle against Israel, as part of the general struggle of the Arab peoples against Israel and imperialism, is the focal point of the Arab revolution. The dialectical relationship between the Palestinian revolution and the Arab revolution as a whole was graphically illustrated in the recent civil war in Jordan, where the logic of the Palestinian struggle against Israel pitted the Palestinian masses against the Hussein regime. It marked a new stage in the independence of the Palestinian fighters from the Soviet bureaucracy and those Arab regimes which accepted the Rogers plan.

Above is an outline of the line our press has been following and should continue to follow.

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For the past few months, there have been differences expressed in The Militant staff concerning the question of whether or not articles which express our line on the Israeli question should include advocating that the Israeli Jews have a right to establish a separate state in the Mideast, as part of our program for the revolution in that area. The letter from Comrades Bob and Berta supports this view.

During July, the ISR editors prepared an edited version of

a talk given to the Militant Labor Forum in New York by Arie Bober. Bober refused to allow this version to be printed unless a section were added presenting the Israeli Socialist Organization's program for the Mideast, including "recognition of the right of the Israeli-Jewish national and all other non-Arab minorities to self-determination." This section was in Bober's original talk, but not in the edited version prepared by the ISR editors. The ISR editors correctly held that if this section were to be added to the published version, then the ISR would be compelled to engage in a polemic with it. Such a polemic, it was felt, would divert from the main questions about Zionism and the Mideast we should be concentrating on at this time. It should be noted that Arie Bober is a member of the Israeli Socialist Organization but is not a Trotskyist.

Concerning the question itself:

1) One argument which is put forward in support of our taking the position that the Israeli Jews have a right to establish a separate state of their own, is that the Israeli Jews have formed a new nationality separate and distinct from world Jewry, and therefore they should be granted the right of self-determination, thus the right to ultimately establish a separate state. The question of whether or not the Israeli Jews form a separate nationality from world Jewry is subject to theoretical investigation. A strong case can be made for the judgement that they do. But the question is moot from the standpoint of the matter under discussion, because it does not follow that because a nationality exists, either as a separate entity or as part of world Jewry, we automatically must fight for its right to form a separate state in the Mideast if it so chooses. Each case must be examined separately and concretely, within the totality of the given conditions. And the key Leninist distinction must be made between an oppressed nationality and an oppressor nationality.

2) Comrades Bob and Berta, however, do not raise the question of supporting the concept that the Israeli Jews have a right to establish a separate state as a slogan to be implemented now. They say, "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 Palestinians 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."

They go on to say, "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." That is, apparently, after the establishment of a workers state or workers states in the region. This concept should "be made explicit today, however," they add.

Thus the question, as formulated by Comrades Bob and Berta, is whether or not we should be raising now, as "a necessary element of a revolutionary program for the Middle East," the concept that the Israeli Jews have a right to establish a state in the Middle East during the "transition from capitalism to socialism."

3) An error in Comrade Bob and Comrade Berta's argument consists of identifying an arithmetical minority nationality with an oppressed nationality. Comrades Bob and Berta are wrong when they say that a "basic principle of proletarian democracy" is "the right of a national group to secede from some larger,

multinational state and form a separate state" Revolutionists call for the right of oppressed nationalities, those who have been denied their democratic rights through national oppression, whether they are a minority or a majority, for self-determination. That is, proletarian internationalism requires that oppressed nationalities have the right to decide to form a separate state, or to exist in a unitary state alongside a former oppressor nationality, or to adopt some other form of self-determination, as the oppressed nationalities so choose. The oppressor nationality has no right to decide this question, whether it is a minority or a majority. It has no right to decide to set up a separate state of its own. The purpose of fighting for this right of oppressed nationalities is to guarantee to the oppressed nationalities whatever state forms they believe are necessary to end their oppression.

Second, in the epoch of imperialism, all struggles by oppressed nationalities tend to merge with the world socialist revolution through the process of permanent revolution. This revolutionary dynamic is entirely missing from the concept of the Israeli Jews -- an oppressor nationality vis a vis the Arab peoples -- having a right to set up a separate state.

Unlike raising the demand for self-determination for the Vietnamese which is directed against imperialism and its lackeys in Saigon, or for the Palestinians, which is directed against the imperialist and Israeli oppressors of the Palestinians, to raise the concept now of a right of the Israeli Jews to set up a separate state, even in the future, is directed against the Arabs, primarily the Palestinians, and in the current struggle helps mobilize Israeli Jews against Arabs, who are oppressed by Israel, and not the other way around.

4) The heart of Comrade Bob and Comrade Berta's argument is the implication that the Israeli Jews will in all likelihood suffer national oppression after a successful Arab revolution. They say: "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." Then they go on to discuss the positions of

the revolutionary forces in Palestine, none of which supports the concept of the Israeli Jews having a right to establish a separate state. (Comrades Bob and Berta's letter was written before receipt of the most recent Fatah statement published in The Militant of October 9 and 16, which has a different position on those Israeli Jews who have established themselves in Israel since 1948 than the one indicated in the Palestinian National Charter referred to by Comrades Bob and Berta.) They conclude: "In short, the Arab national and revolutionary movements at present place the national existence of the Israeli Jews in question both objectively and subjectively."

It is not justifiable to assume that a likely development of the Arab revolution will be the future oppression of the Israeli Jews. There is no reason to believe that the Arab liberation movement -- contrary to the dynamic of such struggles everywhere, contrary to the basic principles being put forward by its most advanced components (the Palestinian liberation fighters), and especially after a socialist revolution -- will institute a system of national oppression of the Israeli Jews. To consider that the Arab revolution will "objectively" threaten the Israeli Jews is an unfounded fear, one which is promulgated by the imperialists and the Zionists, of the revolution itself.

Of course, the possibility of the future oppression of the Israeli Jews by the Arabs cannot be excluded theoretically (if the revolution were to be bureaucratized, for example, or perhaps through some unforeseen turn of events in the process of the Arab revolution before the establishment of a workers state or states in the region, which is not raised by Comrades Bob and Berta.) However, it would be wrong to raise now a concept which could be appropriate if at some future time the Israeli Jews suffered national oppression at the hands of the Arabs, when the real situation is the exact opposite: Israel oppresses and threatens the Arab peoples. To raise a demand which is actually designed to guard against a possible future danger, is abstract and obscures and diverts from the reality, for the real struggle going on right now is for the rights of the Palestinians and other Arabs against the imperialists and Israel.

Moreover, even after the socialist revolution, the most pressing problem would be that the Israeli Jews, who would retain a heritage of special privileges in all fields as compared to the Palestinians and other Arab peoples, could continue to be oppressors rather than oppressed. There is a danger in raising the demand for the right of a formerly oppressor

nationality to form a separate state after a revolution: such a state could objectively result in the safeguarding of the privileges inherited from the past of the formerly oppressor nationality.

For a period of time, until all vestiges of national oppression have been overcome, the revolutionary policy will be to give preferential treatment to formerly oppressed nationalities.

We must insist on guaranteeing the rights of the Palestinians and other Arabs to full self-determination and the full overcoming, through preferential treatment, of all the economic, social and cultural deprivations these people have suffered at the hands of Israel and the imperialist countries, in the period of "transition from capitalism to socialism."

It should be noted that we are discussing the question in the framework of what should or should not be included in a revolutionary program for the Middle East. We are not discussing the likelihood of many Israeli Jews being killed or hurt in the process of the destruction of the state of Israel. This depends upon many factors including the development of the revolutionary struggle in the imperialist countries and the workers' states, the strength of the Leninist parties in the Mideast and the extent to which the Israeli Jewish masses can be won away from active support of the Israeli state rulers to active support of the Palestinian and general Arab liberation movements.

5) On a tactical level Comrades Bob and Berta imply that the best way to split the Israeli Jewish masses and world Jewry from Zionism and support to the Israeli state, is to raise the concept now, as part of our program, of the Israeli Jews having a right to establish a separate state. But it is unlikely that Israeli Jews will be convinced to join the Palestinian struggle to destroy the state of Israel on the grounds that the Palestinians and Arabs promise them the right to set up another state in the future to protect themselves from oppression by these same Arabs. Instead of raising slogans which reinforce the fears -- fostered by imperialism and Zionism -- of the Israeli Jews that they will be oppressed by the victorious Arab revolution, it is the duty of revolutionists to warn the Israeli Jews that Zionism is wholly and completely against their interests, and has led them into the trap of opposing the Arab liberation struggle and of aligning themselves with imperialism, the worst enemy of the Jewish people everywhere.

We should tell the Israeli Jews, as we have in the past, that their future lies only in aligning themselves with the

Palestinian and general Arab liberation movements, wholeheartedly and without any reservation whatever, and it will be to the extent that they do this that they can escape from the trap Zionism and imperialism have prepared for them in the Mideast.

6) Comrades Bob and Berta also imply that adopting the position that the Israeli Jews have a right to establish a separate state after a revolution would be the best way for the Arab liberation movements to demonstrate proletarian internationalism. This is false. Proletarian internationalism does not at all include the concept of oppressed nationalities supporting the self-determination of the oppressors. It does include recognition that the struggles of the oppressed nationality and the toiling masses in the oppressor nationality have the same enemy. But the burden of responsibility for forging a fighting internationalist alliance rests on the proletarian movement of the oppressor nationality or country. It must prove that it is opposed to its own bourgeoisie on this question and will fight side by side with the oppressed nationalities.

To advance the concept that the Israeli Jews have a right to form a separate state in the Mideast, even if the right is not to be applied now but only in case of a successful revolution, would certainly be misunderstood by the Arab masses in their current struggle as a disguised form of Zionism. The Israeli masses would misunderstand it differently -- that they do have something to fear in the Arab revolution. Thus, to advance such a slogan in the present circumstances would call into question the genuineness of our support to the Palestinian struggle to regain their homeland. It could only be twisted by the Zionists to their own advantage under the argument that the Israeli Jews have a state and self-determination today, and that the duty of those who believe in this right is to fight now to preserve Israel even though they may disagree with many aspects of the Zionist state.