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A BI-NATIONAL PALESTINE

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### The fundamental facts

Over 30 years the Zionist movement colonised Palestine, under British imperialist protection. Through deals with Arab landlords they pushed Arab peasants off the land. Through a policy of establishing an autonomous Jewish economy (Jewish labour only, Jewish produce only), they excluded the Arabs from employment.

Then in 1947-9 the Zionist settlers kicked off the British harness, and drove out the majority of the Arabs, or panicked them into fleeing and then prevented them returning home. Some 800,000 Arabs were made refugees. A Jewish State was established over 77% of the land area of Palestine - a country where in 1947 Jews had been only about a third of the population.

The Arabs remaining in the Jewish state - a sizeable minority, nearly 20% of the state's population at first, dropping to 11% in the early '50s with mass Jewish immigration, and then rising again to about 16% today - have been third-class citizens. Most of them lived under military administration for many years after 1948. Much, perhaps most, of their land was confiscated under various pretexts. Many state and quasi-state services and benefits are reserved to Jews only: for example, 92% of the land, controlled by the Jewish National Fund, is reserved for Jews only. Arab municipalities suffer discrimination as regards public services (electricity, water, etc.)

Militant expression of nationalism - i.e. their actual majority politics - is forbidden to the Israeli Arabs. For example, in October 1982, "scores of [Israeli] Palestinians who protested the Sabra and Shatila massacres...[were] still in jails and police detention centres, one month after the wave of protests swept the Galilee and Triangle areas. They face[d] charges of demonstrating, inciting, stoning military vehicles, and supporting the PLO" (Al-Fajr, 29.10.82, quoted in N.Chomsky, 'The Fateful Triangle' p.397).

In 1956, in 1967, in 1973, and again in 1982-5 Israel went to war against the neighbouring Arab states. In between times, Israel pursued a policy of massive reprisals for any Palestinian action. For example, in June 1982, a dissident Palestinian group (which has assassinated several PLO leaders) tried to kill the Israeli ambassador in London. Israel responded by bombing refugee camps in Lebanon, killing over 200 people. The full-scale invasion of Lebanon soon followed.

In 1967 Israel seized those parts of Palestine which the Jewish forces had not conquered in 1948-9, the West Bank and the Gaza

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NOTE: In earlier periods of our debate - for example at our weekend school in August 1984 - I argued for what I took to be a variant of the 'democratic, secular Palestine' position, with a stress on the collective rights within that of the Israeli Jews. This, I thought, was essentially - though not in every detail - consistent with what we argued in the 1970s. Having been able since then to read much more on the issues, and think them through more fully, I suspect that the argument in this article is actually rather closer to the 'two states' position than the traditional 'democratic, secular Palestine'. Anyway, readers will judge for themselves. See discussion below on the 'democratic, secular Palestine' and the 'two states'.



Strip. Another 350,000 or so Arabs were made refugees, many for the second time. (Another wave of some hundreds of thousands of second-time-over refugees has since been generated by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon). Since 1967 those Arabs who remain in the occupied territories have lived under Israeli military rule, without even the rights of the Israeli Arabs. Some 40% of their employed population works in Israel proper, but they are not allowed to stay the night there.

Harassment and straightforward deportations have driven over half a million Arabs out of the occupied territories since 1967, but still some two million Palestinian Arabs - out of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million Palestinian Arabs altogether - live under Israeli rule as third-class citizens or fourth-class non-citizens.

The other  $2\frac{1}{2}$  million are refugees, almost a million of them still living in miserable refugee camps. Even there they are at risk from the Israeli military machine, as in Lebanon recently.

#### The Israeli-Jewish nation

Yet the Israeli Jews are a nation - a nation whose rights must be taken into account for any progress to be possible. They have a national language, a national economy, a more-or-less defined national territory. Despite the increasing use of Arabs as menial, low-paid labour, the Israeli Jews are a nation rather than an exploiting caste like the whites in South Africa. Despite the considerable power of Orthodox rabbis within the Israeli state, the Israeli-Jewish identity is national rather than religious (in 1963 a survey found that only 30% of Israeli Jews were strictly religious, 24% being completely irreligious; among high-school students, in 1968, a majority were found to be atheist or agnostic: H.M.Sachar, 'A History of Israel', p.599).

Israeli-Jewish national consciousness is generally an oppressor-nation consciousness, usually chauvinist, and often shot through with open racism. (A poll in the early '70s found 67% of Israeli Jews saying that Arabs were 'inferior' to Jews, 74% that Jews were 'more intelligent' than Arabs: W.Hollstein, 'Kein Frieden um Israel', p.254. According to many reports, the Israeli atrocities in Lebanon, while generating a protest demonstration of 400,000 - equivalent to five million in Britain - also evoked openly racist approval in large sections of the population).\*

However, these facts do not do away with the reality of the nation. A majority of Israeli Jews - 57% as of December 31 1981 - were born there. A majority of adults - 66% of over-20s - are settlers born elsewhere. But most of them came fleeing persecution - including the persecution under which the Nazis systematically murdered perhaps one-third of all the world's Jews. Most of them individually have, and certainly the community as a whole has, no other homeland.

The argument about whether the Israeli Jews are a nation may seem like quibbling over words. Actually it is quite important. One way of summing up the Palestine question, which expresses important aspects of it if not the whole, is this: two nations

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\* It is wrong simply to label this Israeli chauvinism 'Zionism'. 'Talking Zionism' is reported to be a phrase used by Israeli-Jewish youth to connote pompous waffle; and the high school students' survey cited above found that a majority felt no special identity with or responsibility for non-Israeli Jewry.



claim the same land. The majority on each side refuses to see the other group as a nation, and proposes to make the land its own nation-state with individual minority rights for the other group. But the Jewish state actually fails to give adequate individual rights, even, to the Arabs: and the fundamental reason for that is that the Palestinian Arabs are in fact a nation. An Arab state with promised individual rights for Jews would have the mirror-image problem.

### The Arabs

Before 1947 the Palestinian Arabs were, in their great majority, peasants. Like peasants elsewhere they were not able to create their own autonomous political leadership. They fell under the leadership of the reactionary Arab landlords and money-men. This gave their resistance to Zionist colonisation the form of wild outbursts of peasant fury, topped by chauvinist rhetoric and stained by anti-Jewish atrocities.

After their desperate and bitter rebellion in 1936-9 was suppressed by British and Jewish force, the Palestinian Arabs were politically exhausted for nearly 30 years.

Between 1947 and the late '60s the Arab states spoke in their name. In 1948-9 they talked bloodthirsty chauvinism - Azzam Pasha, general secretary of the Arab League, proclaimed: 'This will become a war of extermination and an enormous massacre' - while actually fighting to see which state could grab most of Arab Palestine for itself. In 1967, again, the Arab leaders proclaimed that they would 'drive the Jews into the sea'.

Meanwhile these Arab states were mistreating and discriminating against the Palestinian refugees in their territory, sometimes carrying out or sponsoring massacres of them (Jordan 1970, Syria/Lebanon 1976).

"If I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child", writes Fawaz Turki ('The Disinherited', p.8), "I am one now. Living in Beirut as a stateless person for most of my growing-up years, many of them in a refugee camp, I did not feel I was living among my 'Arab brothers'. I did not feel I was an Arab, a Lebanese, or, as some wretchedly pious writers claimed, a 'southern Syrian'. I was a Palestinian".

Out of this experience the Palestinians emerged as an autonomous political force, with Fateh's takeover of the PLO in 1968-9. The social composition of the Palestinians had changed dramatically, and there was a new leadership.

"In the relatively short time it took them to show the world where they stood, the Palestinians demonstrated that theirs was a liberation movement that would transcend the Arab rhetoric and the Arab aims of yore. Freed of bitterness and despair, the New Palestinians were learning who the real enemy was. They refused to fall into the trap of racism and blind hate in which both Zionists and Arabs were caught. A firm distinction was made between the Jew and the Zionist, between returning to Palestine and annihilating Israel, between liberation and persecution..." (Turki, p.116).

But the new leadership was and is a bourgeois leadership, attuned to manoeuvring with Arab states and imperialist powers rather than to any endeavour to unite Arabs and Jews from below. Its guerilla attacks frequently hit civilian targets in Israel.



### National self-determination?

Thus the "bitterness and despair" - and, on the other side, the spiralling chauvinism of Israeli-Jewish society - have not been ended.

The general Marxist formula for national conflicts is the right of nations to self-determination. Here, however, two nations claim more or less the same homeland. 'Self-determination' for one means the subordination of the other.

So the formula solves nothing. We must look at the basic Marxist principles underlying the formula.

"The working class supports the bourgeoisie only in order to secure national peace (which the bourgeoisie cannot bring about completely and which can be achieved only with complete democracy), in order to secure equal rights and to create the best conditions for the class struggle... We fight against the privileges and violence of the oppressing nation and do not in any way condone the strivings for privileges on the part of an oppressed nation" (Lenin, 'The Right of Nations to Self-Determination').

### The demands of consistent democracy

Lenin also stresses: "against the practicalness of the bourgeoisie, the proletarians advance their principles in the national question..."

What principles do we have to uphold in Palestine?

The Palestinian Arabs have a right to return to their homeland as equals. Both as a national right and as an individual right, this is no more than elementary democracy.

They have no right to oppress the Israeli Jews. But the right to return as equals is not a demand to oppress. The fact that it is seen by Israeli Jews as threatening them with oppression cannot be a warrant for denying rights to the Palestinian Arabs. Nor can an estimate by us that the Palestinians' return might lead to oppression of the Israeli Jews. Our job is not to devise some balanced system of arrangements to restrain different nationalisms - as if we were decree-makers of history - but to champion clearly the democratic element in every national movement, so as to create and educate the material force which alone can realise consistent democracy.

Palestinian Arabs' individual claims to particular patches of land and houses can be legitimately denied (given compensation) on grounds of 30-40 years' occupation by Jews. But the overall right of a refugee people to return to its homeland is a different matter. Especially so when the refugees see all new land, houses etc in Israel reserved for Jews with no prior connection with Palestine, and whose immigration is deliberately and expensively organised; or when they see new projects carefully sited so as to break up any remaining concentrations of Arab population.

The Israeli Jews have a right to remain in what is now their homeland, too. They have a right to a life as a nation. They have a right to negotiate with the Palestinian Arabs about arrangements for coexistence. They do not have a right to maintain an exclusive Jewish state in another nation's homeland.

In principle a case can be made for a Jewish state. Trotsky



was in favour of one, though only within a world socialist federation\*. But the given Jewish state is sectarian and anti-democratic because it is in the homeland of another nation which was driven out and subjugated by force.

"The Arabs", comments Maxime Rodinson ('Israel and the Arabs', p.232) "could... be asked to accept the fait accompli... At the same time, it is quite certain that no-one is so pure as to have the right to demand acceptance and condemn the Arabs in the name of universal morality if they continue to refuse".

Indeed, a demand for acceptance and a condemnation of refusal in the name of the Israeli Jews would deserve the response that Engels made on another question in relation to Ireland.

"If members of a conquering nation called upon the nation they had conquered and continued to hold down to forget their specific nationality and position, to 'sink national differences' and so forth, that was not Internationalism, it was nothing else but preaching to them submission to the yoke, and attempting to justify and to perpetuate the dominion of the conquerer under the cloak of Internationalism". (Marx and Engels on Ireland, p.303).

#### Summarising the principles of democracy

The only overall perspective into which these demands of democracy can be fitted, as far as I can see, is some sort of federal Palestine.

This might take shape as a federation of one Arab province and one Jewish province (see further on the 'two states' policy, below), or in some more complicated way. The essential idea is to have the right for the Palestinians to return; enough separation of the two nations to enable each to live as a nation; enough integration to secure individual rights and to protect minorities.

#### Palestinian vs. Arab

The above is posed in terms of dealing with the national conflict between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs - not between Israeli Jews and Arabs in general.

The presumption is that the Palestinians are a distinct nation, not merely a sub-section of one pan-Arab nation. It would be possible to puzzle over this question at length, discussing point by point Marxist definitions of a nation; but, as Trotsky put it, "An abstract criterion is not decisive in this question; far more decisive is the historical consciousness of a group, their feelings, their impulses" (Trotsky on Black Nationalism, p.28). On that basis the Palestinian Arabs clearly are a distinct nation.

If they were not - if the matter had to be considered as just Israeli Jews vs Arabs - then I cannot see that it would be

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\* "There is no such thing on our planet as the idea that one has more claim to land than another. The establishment of a territorial base for Jewry in Palestine or any other country is conceivable only with the migrations of large human masses. Only a triumphant socialism can take upon itself such tasks..." (1932-3). "The very same methods of solving the Jewish question which under decaying capitalism have a utopian and reactionary character (Zionism), will, under the regime of a socialist federation, take on a real and salutary meaning" (February 1937). (Both in 'Leon Trotsky on the Jewish Question').



other than chauvinist for the Arabs to deny this little corner of their vast territories to the Israeli Jews. The problem for the refugees would not be return to their homeland - they would still be in their homeland - but material compensation.

It could be argued that the Palestinians' suffering since 1947 has been inflicted as much by the Arab states as by Israel, and that a solution to that suffering could be gained with far less complications by a social revolution directed against the Arab states than by national struggle directed against Israel. And it is true as far as it goes. But we start from the world as it is, not as we would like it to be. The Palestinians are not content simply to merge into the social struggles of the other Arab states. They feel themselves a nation; they want to return to their homeland and recover their dignity and autonomy. And they have a right to do so.

Could a federal Palestine be realised? If so, how?

In a lot of pro-Palestinian literature the implicit assumption is that the agency to restore the Palestinians' rights will be the Arab states. (There seems to be a streak of such thinking in our attitude to the 1973 war, though I recall that in internal discussions at the time we said that if the Arab armies looked like over-running Israel we would shift to defence of the Jews).

There is a grain of truth in this idea. Defeat in war could shake up and radicalise Israeli Jewish politics, while at present the rise of chauvinism seems unstoppable.

But neither the Palestinians nor the Jews would be safe, let alone able to work out any democratic arrangements between them, under the heel of the Arab armies! The Arab states cannot gain legitimacy for their wars from the plight of the Palestinians.\*

This conclusion, of course, has implications for our attitude to the actual wars that have taken place. In 1948-9 the Trotskyists stood for the defeat of both sides anyway. In 1956 and 1967, it seems to me, there were reasonably clear reasons for supporting the Arab states against Israel: Israel was acting as an auxiliary of imperialism, and as a sub-imperialist force itself, against the colonial revolution. About 1973 I'm not sure.

So then how can a democratic programme be realised? Or can it be realised at all? What about the role of military actions by the Palestinians?

Wrong and even criminal though some of those actions have been, the PLO's guerilla campaign has been at times rational from a Palestinian point of view. "Although the movement lacked... the potential to pose any serious military threat to Israel, and although the cruelty and frequent ineptitude of its terrorist practice earned it little sympathy in the world, it nevertheless succeeded in establishing the image of its cause as the quest of a victimised people for national self-determination, rather than a neglected refugee problem as it had hitherto been widely regarded" (Noah Lucas, 'The Modern History of Israel', p.437).

It is difficult to see how a guerilla campaign could possibly achieve more than that. So the central element of any struggle for a democratic solution has to be the mobilisation of the Pale-

\* Besides, in the foreseeable future there is no chance of the Arab states defeating Israel in a war. Israel is the 3rd or 4th greatest military power in the world.



were a Palestinian state they could fight to affiliate to it" (Weinstock, p.xiii).

In principle he favours a two-state solution, but not necessarily on the 1967 borders. The problem, he says, can only be resolved within a socialist Middle East.\*

What would a 'two states' deal mean?

I am not quite clear what Machover means by the Israeli Arabs "affiliating" to a Palestinian state. There are some areas within Israel which in 1948 were almost entirely Arab and which are still heavily Arab today: but for almost 40 years the Israeli state has pursued a ruthless policy of breaking them up, and encircling them at the state boundaries, with Jewish settlements. Secession seems improbable.

If 'affiliating' just means renouncing Israeli citizenship in favour of citizenship in the new Palestinian state, then it would seem to be a quick route to the Israeli Arabs losing even those minimal rights they have today.

But some possibilities would be opened by a 'two states' deal. Conditions for class struggle within the Palestinian nation would improve. At present:

"In Gaza, unions scarcely exist. In the West Bank, where there is a General Federation of Workers [which is banned from operating in Israel], the dominance of nationalist over class sentiments also means that its members seldom take militant action against exploitative Palestinian employers" (MERIP, June 1983).

In the event of a revolution in Jordan, a West Bank/Gaza strip state might merge with Jordan, to create a Palestinian state which would be much less of a labour-reservation/Bantustan than the West Bank and Gaza alone. Jordan's population is at present about one-third Palestinian, and a Jordan-West-Bank-Gaza state would be about one half Palestinian, or more, depending on how many refugees from elsewhere entered it.

Such a Jordanian-Palestinian state might, over time, come to satisfy the Palestinians' aspirations for a homeland and an independent national life.

But for the moment that is hypothetical. And it would be a rotten evasion to propose as a answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that the Palestinians should instead work for a political revolution in Jordan.

Meanwhile, a two-states set-up would contain many less pleasant possibilities.

The West Bank and the Gaza Strip are not, by any reckoning, a national territory. They are simply the bits of Palestine which the Israeli armies did not manage to seize in 1948-9. Moshe Machover makes the point that socialists should not fetishise geographical units. Our problem is to find a solution for two nations of people, not for one area of land. True enough: but in Palestine any partition line would be highly arbitrary.

In fact, a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza would

\* This is essentially the USFI majority position: see below.



have 20% of the land of Palestine, and that generally the most barren. Its territory would comprise two disconnected parts, and it would be dependent on Israel's grace and favour for communications between them. Its economic life would be dominated by Israel. Even supposing that it was able to obtain substantial funds (in reparations/compensation from Israel, or from elsewhere), it would hardly be able to accommodate most of the 2½ million Palestinians outside Palestine if they wished to return, as most would.

True, it is utopian to demand economic equality of nations within a market system: but in the actual case the extreme economic subordination of the Palestinian state would follow not from general economic laws, but from the massively inequitable political character of the partition.

Rather than being an autonomous national territory, the West Bank and Gaza Strip are essentially fringe areas of the Israeli state. Thus the interlocking between the West Bank and Gaza areas, and pre-1967 Israel, is rather closer than the bare figures - 83% Jewish in Israel, 90%-plus Arab in the West Bank and Gaza - would indicate.

Just over half all the land in the West Bank is now Israeli-owned (Guardian, April 1 1985). Assume that land is given up as part of a settlement (though its extent is an index of just how difficult it will be to force Israel even to concede a West Bank/Gaza state).

Still, 40% of the workforce in the West Bank and Gaza works in Israel.

The Arabs in Israel are more than a marginal untidiness in the situation. They are one-third of all the Palestinian Arabs in Palestine. Within Israel they form one-sixth of the population - a similar proportion, for example, to the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, alongside Israel, would not, therefore, be a democratic solution even in the most minimal sense.

For the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza it would remove the oppression they suffer from the Israeli military occupation. But it would leave them, not with an autonomous national life, but existing as a glorified labour reservation or bantustan for Israel.

A few of the 2½ million Palestinians who are at present refugees outside Palestine might be able to return. But most would not.\*

The Arabs within Israel would be no better off. In a 1974-5 poll 29% of them said they would definitely move to a West Bank Palestinian state if it were established, and another 38% said they might move. Plenty of Israeli Jews would be keen to give them a push, though whether the Palestinian mini-state could accommodate them is another question. Those who remained would be suspected (rightly) of allegiance to a foreign state, and would probably suffer even worse discrimination within Israel than they do now.

Logically, the justice in principle of a West Bank/Gaza state

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\* For all to return, the West Bank & Gaza would have to treble their population. In 1948-51 Israel about doubled its Jewish population. But it had massive funds from abroad, and a large stock of houses and cultivated land left by the 800,000 Arabs who had been driven out.



is separable from the question of any conditions that might be imposed on that state by Israel and the US: you could support the settlement in principle while opposing those conditions. But the fact is that very tight conditions would probably be imposed - demilitarisation of the state, and/or subordination of it to Jordan.

Unless those conditions were so tight as completely to beat down the Palestinians and shatter their national spirit, conflict would continue. Communications between the West Bank and Gaza\*; treatment within Israel of commuting workers from the West Bank and Gaza; the position of the Israeli Arabs - all would be causes of conflict.

Said Hammami's picture of the West Bank/Gaza state "drawing the poison of hatred" is by no means the most probable outcome. The Palestinians would still be resentful (and rightly). Probably the resentment of Palestinians living cheek-by-jowl with the Israeli state, in an impoverished ersatz homeland, would be even more bitter than that of refugees for whom Israel is a rather distant enemy. Meanwhile, many liberal Israelis who at present support a West Bank/Gaza state would probably recoil when they saw that the Palestinians were still surly and uppity and hostile to Israel.

Noam Chomsky's assessment (in an article in 'Israel and the Palestinians', ed. Davis, Mack, Yuval-Davis, Ithaca Press 1975) seems closer to the mark:

"Two states in cis-Jordan, one Jewish, one Palestinian: that would be a possible outcome of the conflict of claims to the same territory... [But it can be achieved only by imperial force. And:] A Palestinian state will be subordinated to Israel and Jordan, which will be allied to ensure that it has limited scope for development or independence...

"The West Bank and Gaza Strip might continue to provide Israel with a reservoir of cheap labour, as has been the case since 1967. It is likely that a Palestinian state will be a mirror-image of Israel: an Arab state, based on discriminatory principles much like those of its counterpart... The seeds of conflict will remain..." (p.376).

The symmetry is somewhat overdone. While the Arabs in Israel are the long-time population of the area, the Jews in the West Bank and Gaza are recent settlers. And they are not people exercising an individual right of free movement; they are participants in the Israeli state's project to colonise the area. Israel has no claim to the West Bank and Gaza except on frankly imperialist arguments. The Palestinian Arabs have at the very least some claim to an interest in Israel.

But the gist of Chomsky's argument seems right. He continues:

"It is difficult to see how Israel and the Palestinians can extricate themselves from the dynamics... leading either to

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\* The Palestinian mini-state might of course be the West Bank only, not Gaza. But then either the 500,000 Arabs in Gaza would remain under occupation; or they would be incorporated into Israel, raising its Arab minority to 25%; or they would be driven out.



war, or to continued Israeli domination of most of the occupied territories, with war always threatening, or to a two-state solution in cis-Jordan imposed by imperial force. But that is not to say that the Israeli and Palestinian left... should adopt any such programme... [They should instead argue] to move towards integration of the two states, first through some federal structure (perhaps sooner or later including Jordan as well), and later, with the growth of trust and mutual interest, towards a bi-national arrangement..." \* (p.392).

### 'Two states' in principle

Matzpen, as noted above, advocates two states as a general formula without endorsing the specific West Bank/Gaza scheme.

On a very general level of principle, this makes sense. Each nation would have its own life. Given an adequate territory for the Palestinian state, the Palestinians would have the right to return. The scheme gives rights to the Israeli Jews, but it might also be preferable for the Palestinians: after all, in any common Israeli-Jewish/Palestinian state, the Palestinians would be at greater risk of suffering subordination.\*\*

But how could such a scheme conceivably be realised? There is no natural partition line. Inside a federal set-up, one could imagine some heavily-Arab areas of pre-1967 Israel being ceded to the Arab part of the federation; also, it would matter less that the Arab territory was smaller and less compact. But who, what force, is going to chop up pre-1967 Israel and allocate chunks to a completely separate state? It could only be done by absolutely overwhelming external force. But what external force of such power would want, or could be trusted to, carry through such a partition? It could be carried through only by massive population movements and against bitter hostility on all sides. No doubt it would be accompanied by atrocities against those - Jews or Arabs, but mainly Arabs - found on the 'wrong' side of the line. That does not look like a democratic solution.

### Summary

This brings us to the following conclusions, which should stand as an amended version of my statement in IB 132.

1. Israel is a settler-colonial state, founded on the eviction and dispossession of the Palestinians.
2. The Israeli Jews, however, now form a nation with a homeland in Israel.

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\*\* There are  $3\frac{1}{2}$  million Israeli Jews -  $4\frac{1}{2}$  Palestinians, but not all would return. The Jews are wealthier, more educated, etc. The Arab states might, up to a point, weigh on the side of the Palestinians, but the Israeli Jews also have powerful external allies.

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\* By 'bi-national' Chomsky means a scheme of the sort advocated by left and liberal Zionists in the '30s and '40s. It meant essentially parallel Jewish and Arab parliaments, each with a veto. Even if some Zionists meant it sincerely as a scheme for reconciliation, in practice it was an arrangement for giving the Zionist minority enough power to continue colonisation until it became a majority, and could form a Jewish state. Today it would have all the disadvantages of 'confessional'-type systems. I've used the term binational in the title of this article to underline the issue of two nations rather than detailed constitutional schemes.



3. Israel oppresses the Arabs in Israel as second-class citizens. It holds down the Arabs of the occupied territories by military force, and uses them as a reservoir of cheap labour. Meanwhile 2½ million Palestinians remain in forced exile, most of them refugees with a precarious existence.

4. The Palestinians form a nation. They have suffered cruel oppression from the Arab states as well as from Israel.

5. Therefore: the Palestinians have a right to return to their homeland; they have a right to a life as a nation. The Israeli Jews also have a right to a life as a nation.

6. In line with these principles we support the Arabs' struggle in Israel for equality; resistance by the Arab states to imperialist or sub-imperialist attacks by Israel; self-determination for the Arabs in the occupied territories. We do not necessarily support the Arab states in every conflict with Israel; we do not advocate that Israel be destroyed by those states.

In general we support the Palestinians, as the oppressed, against Israel as the oppressor.

7. As an immediate demand, and in line with the rights of the population of the occupied territories, we support Israeli withdrawal from those territories and the creation of an independent Palestinian state there. Such a move, however, would not be a consistently democratic solution to the conflict; it could not satisfy the justified demands of the Palestinians.

8. In principle, a different 'two-states' partition of Palestine might provide a basis for a democratic solution. In reality such a scheme could be enforced only by overwhelming external force: it is difficult to see how it could be part of a programme on which to build a united Jewish-Palestinian workers' party.

9. We therefore advocate, as a general formula, a federal state in Palestine, giving the right for the Palestinians to return; enough separation of the two nations to enable each to live as a nation; enough integration to secure individual rights and to protect minorities.

The details of this (how close or loose the federation? the boundaries of the provinces? measures to guard against subordination of the Palestinians within the state?) remain to be worked out.

10. The objective of all our policies is to work out a programmatic basis for a united Jewish-Palestinian workers' party, which will participate in the struggle for a socialist federation of the Middle East.

#### Doubts and queries

Maybe it is obvious that I am not entirely satisfied with this conclusion. It may be useful to spell out the problems as I see them: maybe then the discussion can redefine them or solve them.

There are competing national claims. If you start from the Israeli Jews' national claims - rejecting only the obviously imperialist claim to the occupied territories - then you are left with the West Bank/Gaza state - with all the problems as discussed above. If you start exclusively from the Palestinians' national claims, then you are left either with hopelessness (because they are not strong enough), or with a programme of the Arab states



conquering Israel and holding down the Jews in much the same way as the whites in the Southern States of the USA were held down in the years immediately after the Civil War.

Now in principle our approach as Marxists to national conflicts should be not to align ourself with any nationalism, but consistently to champion the democratic elements in every national movement.

That should give us some third course, independent of the two narrow nationalist alternatives. But then the question is: is what I've outlined above really that third course, or is it an attempt to square the circle? An artificially 'balanced' concoction of shreds of the different nationalisms? I'm not sure.

#### Marxism and Palestine

In conclusion, it may be useful to summarise very briefly - as a check on our discussion - the historical positions of our movement on Palestine.

In the 1920s and '30s, Marxists argued for the abandonment of the Zionist colonisation project in Palestine - calling it a reactionary utopia - and for the Jews already in Palestine to unite with the Arabs and fight against British imperialism.

In 1947 the small Palestinian Trotskyist group issued the following slogans:

"Down with the partition of Palestine. For a united and independent Arab Palestine, with full national minority rights for the Jewish community.\*

"Down with imperialist intervention in Palestine...

"Down with the Arab League, instrument of imperialism. Down with the corrupt kings and the exploiting feudalists. Long live the Arab socialist revolution in the Middle East".

They opposed all the military forces involved - Zionists, Arab states, Arab guerillas - and concluded that the situation forced on them "the necessity of temporarily falling back on the modest tasks of maintaining contact between Jewish and Arab comrades and strengthening cadres" for future struggles (see N.Weinstock, 'Zionism, false messiah', p.258-9).

It should be recalled that at the time Zionism was an extremely popular cause on the broad left, and indeed a substantial section of the French Trotskyist movement, at least, was more or less pro-Zionist. "Regardless of the political terrain on which the Irgun places its struggle", wrote La Verite on 25.4.47, "we salute in Gruner [an Irgun martyr] a determined fighter for Palestinian independence". Or, "the action of the Irgun, at the present stage, is objectively anti-imperialist" (21.3.47).

The creation of the Israeli state, and its consolidation through mass Jewish immigration in 1948-51, changed the situation. There was no Palestinian national movement. But from about 1952 a wave of anti-imperialist struggles swept the Arab countries.

In 1959 Michel Pablo, then a central leader of the would-be Trotskyist mainstream, wrote: "The only fair solution for [the

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\* A federal Palestine was proposed in 1947 by the minority on the UN committee - India, Iran, Yugoslavia. Both Arab and Jewish leaders rejected it.



Palestinian refugees<sup>7</sup> painful and explosive problem is their re-installation in Palestine... the present state of Israel being absorbed as a national minority enjoying a regime of self-government and full cultural freedoms within a United Arab Republic of the Middle East" ('The Arab Revolution', p.37).

Similar formulas - such as 'self-determination for the Israeli Jews within a socialist federation of the Middle East' - were widely used among Trotskyists, for example by us in 1967. Workers' Eight no.1 (Oct.1967) recommended "breaking from racist Zionism and the role of imperialist stooge, and turning to friendly cooperation with the Arab states against imperialism. The precondition for such a change is an end to the exclusively Jewish (Xionist) nature of the State of Israel, bringing to an end the oppression of the Arab minority. Israel must withdraw from the occupied territories and pay for reinstating and compensating all the refugees - from '67 and '48".

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the situation changed in two ways. An autonomous Palestinian movement developed (from the late 1960s), and proposed the 'democratic, secular state' formula. From about 1973 it became clear that the 'Arab revolution' had essentially run its course, and that US imperialism was shifting from its almost-exclusive reliance on Israel (in the 1960s) to a policy of seeking to work through both the Arab states and Israel.

Many Trotskyists, including us, took up the democratic, secular state formula. Others didn't. Lutte Ouvriere remained with the old formula; so did the USFI majority. The USFI majority, however, tended to transform it into a riddle-me-ri: self-determination for the Israeli Jews after the socialist revolution in the Middle East and after the destruction of Zionism and the Israeli state. This means they have no democratic programme now, before the socialist revolution; also they have a strange scenario of destroying the Israeli Jews' present state and then giving them another, supposedly guaranteed free of Zionist coloration.

We had a debate in 1977 on the 'West bank state' proposal. (See Workers Action nos.54, 55). The view of the majority was that while we might not oppose the Palestinians taking such a mini-state as the best possible in the circumstances, objectively it could be assessed as nothing better than a defeat for the Palestinian cause: "a 'way forward'... only into an Arab reservation or Bantustan..."