

Free Palestine!

A Workers Party Pamphlet

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Introduction:

Why is Palestine important?

Why should New Zealand workers care about what is going on in Palestine? The Palestinians have been fighting for their independence for over half a century. During this time, they have resisted invasion and occupation by one of the most advanced military forces in the world. They have resisted occupation for over forty years. And despite all that has happened over the last sixty years, many have retained a progressive vision of a secular socialist Palestine. with equality for all.

When it comes to left-wing political activity, the world is in the midst of a protracted downturn. The collapse of the Soviet bloc, whatever its faults (and there were many), was followed by a sharp shift to the right in many of the world's liberation struggles. In South Africa, the ANC moved away from its social democratic Freedom Charter towards an adoption of free market capitalism, the destructive impact of which is evident in South Africa today. The same occurred in Namibia, where SWAPO moved in the same direction, and in the front line states that were previously thought of as left wing, notably Angola and Mozambique. Other movements also went into retreat or capitulated completely, as happened in Northern Ireland, where Sinn Fein moved significantly to the right. The impact of this global change is still with us, with the world still largely

suffering the effects of the victory of imperialism over the only significant non-capitalist bloc.

There are exceptions to this capitulation to imperialism however, and one of those is the struggle in Palestine. The Palestinian people have maintained their struggle against imperialism in the form of the colonial Zionist state of Israel ever since the establishment of that state in 1948. The struggle has waxed and waned throughout the six decades since the Nakbah, the ‘catastrophe’ when Palestine became Israel and the Palestinians became a stateless people. The Palestinians have been at times the recipients of (generally dubious) support from the conservative Arab regimes in the region. Until the collapse of the USSR, they received some support from that source. The decline and final collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the gradual but successful strategy of picking off the Arab states, through economic and diplomatic pressure in cases such as Egypt, or more recently through invasion as in the case of Iraq. Egypt, the largest of all the Arab nations, now not only recognises but actively supports the Israeli state in isolating the Palestinian people. Necessarily, the nature of the struggle has changed. Leadership of the Palestinian struggle has increasingly come from conservative religious movements broadly referred to as Islamist, and the regimes which back them, such as Saudi Arabia. Throughout all of this, the Palestinian people have continued to resist in the face of an increasingly belligerent Zionism, an Israeli state supported actively or passively by the West. This puts the Palestinian struggle at the forefront of the global struggle against imperialism.

A victory over imperialism anywhere in the world is a victory for all anti-imperialist struggles and for all working people. But often, many working class people do not identify with those who are struggling for freedom around the world. In the case of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, the history of Jewish suffering in the Nazi holocaust and previous experiences of anti-Semitic pogroms tends to encourage sympathy for the Israeli people and their state. Diplomatic contact with Israel, the ease of travel there, promotion of tourism and the identification of Israel as “one of us”, a democratic, Western and essentially European nation fighting for its survival in a sea of hostile, alien, Islamic and undemocratic Arab states, all leads towards identification with the Israeli people against the “other”.

If working people around the world can be won over to support for the

Palestinian cause, that will be a great victory for both the Palestinians and for the working class as a whole. In New Zealand, this will be a real tangible step forward in the long slow process of rebuilding a combative working class movement in this country. It will be a major step forwards not only because it will mean meaningful solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, but because it will mark a shift within the working class in New Zealand away from nationalism towards progressive internationalism, a shift that is essential if the working class here is ever to achieve its own liberation. The Palestinian people are fighting our fight. They are at the cutting edge of the global fight against imperialism and, for that reason alone, deserve our support. But, ultimately, supporting their struggle will also be a measure of progress in our own struggle.

Anti-Semitism and the emergence of Zionism

If we want to understand the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, we need to be clear about the true nature of the Israeli state. That does not just mean now, or as it was in 1967, when it annexed the the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Gaza, but as it was at its very inception. This means analysing the actual circumstances in Palestine and Europe before the formation of Israel, the ideology that drove the establishment of the state, and the extent to which that ideology was successfully integrated into the reality of the state that did emerge.

European anti-Semitism in the nineteenth century was a real threat to Jewish communities. Pogroms against the Jews were frequently whipped up as a means to distract people from the real cause of their misery – the normal functioning of the capitalist system. The French Revolution had led to France becoming the first European country to grant full citizenship rights to Jews, but the rolling back of the Enlightenment principles of the revolution meant anti-Semitism was still widespread. The ruling class in Europe found in the Jews a highly convenient scapegoat to channel discontent away from a movement that might really threaten their hold on power in an era when revolution was a real fear, when as Marx and Engels put it, “a spectre [was] haunting Europe”. The Jews, as an oppressed and persecuted minority in Europe, were not, by and large, rich capitalists and money lenders, but overwhelmingly working class. Jews featured prominently in the working class movements of the day.

Zionism, the ideology that argues that Jews need a Jewish state of their own, was from the outset a reactionary movement. It focussed on identifying Jewishness as a form of nationalism and aimed to establish a Jewish “home” through the dispossession of the Palestinian people.

Theodor Herzl, often referred to as the father of modern Zionism, called the First Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland in 1897 and the Congress released the Basel Programme, which declared:

Zionism seeks to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law. The Congress contemplates the following means to the attainment of this end

1. The promotion by appropriate means of the settlement in Palestine of Jewish farmers, artisans, and manufacturers.
2. The organization and uniting of the whole of Jewry by means of appropriate institutions, both local and international, in accordance with the laws of each country.

3. The strengthening and fostering of Jewish national sentiment and national consciousness. Preparatory steps toward obtaining the consent of governments, where necessary, in order to reach the goals of Zionism.

To this was added a handwritten fourth clause:

4. Preparatory steps toward obtaining the consent of governments, where necessary, in order to reach the goals of Zionism.

Herzl recorded in his diary that at Basel he had “founded the Jewish state. If not in five years, then certainly in fifty, everyone will realize it.” While his diary note may seem uncannily prophetic now – the state of Israel was founded 51 years after he wrote it – at the time, there was little sign that such an outcome could be achieved. That it was achieved required the duplicitous actions of the British government during the First World War. The first significant role that Britain would play came with the massive outflow of Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms in Russia. Between 1881 and 1914 Britain’s Jewish population was swelled by the arrival of 150,000 Russian Jewish refugees. The British government began to look more closely at the possibility of relocating the “Jewish problem” to Palestine. This would potentially kill two birds with one stone, removing the Jewish population from Britain itself and simultaneously establishing a dependable ally in the Middle East. But nothing was settled at this point. In 1916, the French and British governments drew up in secret the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which carved a large part of the Ottoman Empire into British and French controlled zones and areas of influence. The agreement was released in 1917 by the Bolsheviks after the Russian revolution, much to the embarrassment of the British and French governments. The agreement promised a degree of Arab independence within part of the territory, although British Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour later declared that the British government had no intention of honouring that promise to the Arabs, writing that:

In Palestine we do not propose even to go through the form of consulting the wishes of the present inhabitants of the country ... The four powers are committed to Zionism and Zionism, be it right or wrong, good or bad, is rooted in age-long tradition, in present needs, in future hopes, of far profounder import than the desire and prejudices of the 700,000 Arabs who now inhabit that ancient land. ¹

1. Memorandum by Mr. Balfour (Paris) respecting Syria, Palestine, and Mesopotamia, 11 August 1919, http://www.mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/british_mandate_palestine.htm, Accessed 3 May, 2010.

This later statement certainly accorded with the position the British Cabinet took in 1917, when it issued the Balfour Declaration², only three weeks before the leaking of the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Balfour Declaration, written to British Jewish leader Baron Walter Rothschild completely overturned all commitments to Arab independence, instead giving Palestine to the Zionists:

Foreign Office,

November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Arthur Balfour'. Above the signature, there is a small handwritten note that says 'Y. in' with a checkmark.

Balfour Declaration

2. <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace%20Process/Guide%20to%20the%20Peace%20Process/The%20Balfour%20Declaration>, Accessed 3 May, 2010.

In this declaration, the British government committed itself to a course of enabling Jewish emigration to Palestine. Ultimately, despite the concession to the existing “non-Jewish population”, this meant the establishment of a Jewish state in what would become British Mandate Palestine in June 1922 established at the end of World War I.³

Even after securing British imperialist support for the project, Zionism was a marginal ideology in the pre-WWII era. Jewish emigration to Palestine was minimal. In 1890, of a population of 520,000 in Palestine, approximately 20-25,000 (or about 4-5%) were Jewish. Given the Zionists’ zeal for emigration, this changed relatively slowly over the next four decades. According to the first British Census of Palestine in 1922, there were just under 84,000 Jewish residents, 11% of the 750,000-strong population. In fact the vast majority of Jews leaving Europe throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went to America. From 1890 to 1924 for every Jew who went to Palestine, twenty seven went to the Americas. It was only when, in 1924, the USA implemented policies to allow immigration only in proportion to the population balance as it was in 1890, that Jewish migration began to move elsewhere. Even then, it was only in the 1930s that the number of Jews moving to Palestine really picked up. By 1931, the Jewish population had risen to approximately 175,000, 16.9% of the total population of just over one million. The vast majority of migrants went to Palestine not through belief in Zionism but because, when repression in Europe was stepped up, they had few choices other than to go to Palestine because other countries were barring their entry or, in the case of Britain, enabling them to go to Palestine on payment of a fee. Between 1931 and 1945, the Jewish population of Palestine more than tripled, to 553,600, or 31% of the total population. It had taken the horrors of Nazism for the Zionist project to finally gain momentum.

3. The mandate system was established by the League of Nations which was set up after WW1.

Zionism finally moves to Palestine

Israel was built from the outset on the basis of forced dispossession of the Palestinian people already living there. This was made clear well before the establishment of the state by people who went on to hold top leadership positions in the government of the new country. Zionists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries travelled to Palestine and shattered any illusion that this was an empty country waiting to be settled. Ahad Ha'Am, a Russian Jew who visited Palestine in 1891, observed:

We abroad are used to believe the Eretz Yisrael is now almost totally desolate, a desert that is not sowed But in truth that is not the case. Throughout the country it is difficult to find fields that are not sowed. Only sand dunes and stony mountains are not cultivated. ⁴

From then on, the Zionists had to deal with the reality of their project. Palestine was not an empty land. It was a well populated land; the Palestinians were very real. And for the Zionist dream to be fulfilled, they would have to be moved. The focus of the ideological justification for “cleansing” Palestine of the Palestinians began to shift towards declaring that the Palestinians were not “a people”, in the sense that they were a “nation” with national rights to the area where they were living. Ukrainian born Zionist and later Prime Minister Golda Meir stated in 1969:

There were no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.⁵

What she was trying to claim was that because the Palestinians had never gained full independence in the form of a state with recognised international borders,

4. Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1999*, Knopf, 1999, p. 42.

5. *Ibid*, pp. 142-4.

the Palestinian inhabitants of the British Mandate Territory were able to be removed without qualms. But they were living there, and had been doing so for over a thousand years. The fact of their having been dominated by more powerful nations and empires, be they Turkish or British, did not in any way diminish their right to continued occupation of their land. The irony was that the Zionists had no more claim to status as a nation than did the Palestinians, and no right to supplant the Palestinians in their own land. The Zionist assault on Palestine and its inhabitants had to take place for the Zionist dream to come to fruition. Moshe Sharrett, Israel's first foreign minister and briefly (in 1954) Prime Minister, addressed the issue of the Palestinians as "a people" more honestly when, in 1914, he argued that the interests of the Zionists could never be reconciled with those of "the Arabs", whom some had described as a "fraternal people". Sharrett saw no need to deny the Palestinians their status as a nation, only a need to deprive them of their land:

We have forgotten that we have not come to an empty land to inherit it, but we have come to conquer a country from people inhabiting it, that governs it by the virtue of its language and savage culture Recently there has been appearing in our newspapers the clarification about "the mutual misunderstanding" between us and the Arabs, about "common interests" [and] about "the possibility of unity and peace between two fraternal peoples." [But] we must not allow ourselves to be deluded by such illusive hopes for if we cease to look upon our land, the Land of Israel, as ours alone and we allow a partner into our estate - all content and meaning will be lost to our enterprise. ⁶

Joseph Weitz, Israel's first president, was equally candid:

Once again I come face to face with the land settlement difficulties that emanate from the existence of two people in close proximity... only population transfer and evacuating this country so it would become exclusively for us is the solution.⁷

The early political leaders of the Israeli state felt little need to conceal their motives. They felt that they had a God-given and absolute right to carry out the colonisation of Palestine. David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister,

6. Ibid, p. 91.

7. Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992, p. 132.

Palestinian loss of land 1946 to 2000

Palestinian and Jewish land 1946

UN Partition plan 1947

1949-1967

2000



emphasised what was at stake for the project and what was necessary in order for it to succeed:

The compulsory transfer of the [Palestinian] Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had, even when we stood on our own during the days of the first and second Temples... We are given an opportunity which we never dared to dream of in our wildest imaginings. This is more than a state, government and sovereignty, this is national consolidation in a free homeland. With compulsory transfer we [would] have a vast area [for settlement]... I support compulsory transfer. I don't see anything immoral in it.⁸

The leadership of the Zionist movement did not confine themselves to the production of radical propaganda in favour of their cause. They began to set up armed organizations to drive the Palestinians, with their “savage culture”, out of their homes, so that “God’s chosen” could take up residence in their place. The most significant organisation, the *Haganah*, Defence in Hebrew, was formed in 1920 from earlier armed groups and went on to form the basis of the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces, the current Israeli state’s army). A split from the Haganah in

8. Morris, pp. 142-4.

1931 saw the creation of the Irgun, which believed the Haganah was not brutal enough in its use of military force against the Palestinians. In 1940, Avraham Stern took his group, Lehi, also known as the Stern Gang, out of the Irgun, the mainstream Zionist irregular army, arguing in favour of attacks on British interests in Palestine, the intention being that a British withdrawal would open the door for unlimited Jewish migration to Palestine.

The establishment of the Zionist state and the Nakbah

The newly-formed United Nations agreed on a partition plan on November 29 1947, in a 33 to 13 vote with ten abstentions. No Arab state voted in favour. At the time Jews comprised 33% of the population, Palestinians 67%. The plan would have given 43% of the Mandate territory to the Palestinian state, 56% to the new Israeli state, with Jerusalem to remain distinct, as an internationally-administered city. The Jewish Agency, the major Jewish governmental body in Palestine, accepted the settlement, although it was never their intention to honour the partition, as key Zionist leaders made clear. Ben Gurion had declared in 1937:

The Jewish people have always regarded, and will continue to regard Palestine as a whole, as a single country which is theirs in a national sense and will become theirs once again. No Jew will accept partition as a just and rightful solution.⁹

This view did not change. At the time of the UN announcement of the partition plan, he reiterated his conviction that all of Palestine was the property of the Jews by right:

No Jew is entitled to give up the right of the Jewish nation to the land. It is not in the authority of any Jew or of any Jewish body; it is not even in the authority of the entire nation alive today to give up any part of the land ... this is a standing right

9. Ben Gurion, cited in Daniel Johnson, "The Palestinian Counter-Holocaust", *Salem News*, June 8, 2009. See: http://www.salem-news.com/articles/june082009/counter_holocaust_dj_6-8-09.php, Accessed 4 May, 2010.

under all conditions. Even if, at any point, the Jews choose to decline it, they have no right to deprive future generations of it. Our right to the entire land exists and stands for ever.¹⁰

He recommended that his Mapai (Israeli Labour) Party accept partition as it would not be final, “not with regard to the regime, not with regard to borders, and not with regard to international agreements.”¹¹

Lehi and Irgun flatly rejected the plan. Menachem Begin, Irgun commander and later Israeli Prime Minister, fumed:

The Partition of Palestine is illegal. It will never be recognized Jerusalem was and will for ever be our capital. Eretz Israel will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And for Ever.¹²

The Zionists in Palestine had not waited for formal independence to begin carving out territory for the Jewish population at the expense of the existing people. The Jewish National Fund, formed in 1901, had begun purchasing land at its inception and, by 1948, owned approximately four percent of Palestine. The JNF was established with the express purpose of buying up land in Palestine for the exclusive use of Jews. The buying up of land for Jewish settlement was never going to be sufficient however. To achieve the objective of a Jewish “home”, the Zionists needed political independence and the capacity to expel the Palestinians once and for all from their country.

The zeal with which the Zionists undertook their plan brought them into conflict with the British, who still had the League of Nations mandate over the territory. The British, while they had cynically betrayed the Arab people in declaring their support for a Jewish “home” in Palestine, still had to balance this with their broader imperial interests in the Middle East. During the Second World War, the official Zionist position had been to support Britain in the war effort against Nazism and Zionists had actively recruited soldiers for the war. Britain’s unwillingness to allow completely uncontrolled Jewish immigration to

10. <http://www.jewishquarterly.org/issuearchive/article0831.html?articleid=332>, Accessed 3 May 2010.

11. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*, Pantheon, 1987, p. 32.

12. Avi Shlaim, *Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, W. W. Norton, 2001, p. 25.

Palestine prompted some of the Zionists to take up arms against the British. Lehi in particular supported the strategy of attacking British interests and carried out a series of attacks on British targets, in addition to the assassination of Folke Bernadotte, the UN mediator. Irgun conducted its own attacks on the British, most notably the bombing of the King David Hotel in 1946. British resolve to continue control of Palestine proved not to be very strong and the British government declared that their mandate would be relinquished on May 15, 1948. David Ben Gurion declared Israeli independence the day before.

The expulsion of the Palestinian inhabitants of the country began in earnest in March 1948, with the commencement of “Plan Dalet”, which entailed carrying out assaults on Palestinian villages. These were intended to terrorise the people in other villages to flee without a fight, but the actions did not occur without resistance. As a result, fighting broke out in many locations as people attempted to defend their homes from the Irgun, Lehi and Haganah. But even renouncing armed force and cooperating with the enemy was not sufficient to spare villagers from attack. The Zionist forces wished to send a message to the Palestinians that they were not welcome anywhere in the land sought for the establishment of the Israeli state. Hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages were depopulated or destroyed. The best known of these attacks is the assault on the village of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, five weeks before Israel declared its independence.

Many people were already leaving Palestine in fear of the Zionist militias. But the people living in Deir Yassin had made a point of staying out of the fight, even going so far as to maintain contact with the Israeli armed groups and making Arab fighters unwelcome in their village. According to Haganah commander Yoma Ben-Sasson, “there was not even one incident between Deir Yassin and the Jews”. Somewhat naively, they believed they could weather the storm of fighting all around them if they just cooperated with the Israeli forces.

However that was not to be. On the morning of April 9, they were awoken by the sound of gunfire as Irgun and Lehi fighters began their assault. Many villagers began to flee but others stayed to defend their homes. The Israeli assault was incompetent and made very slow progress against resolute defence by the villagers and a few Arab volunteers. Eventually the irregulars had to call in the Haganah’s elite Palmach troops to do, in Lehi officer David Gottlieb’s words, “in one hour what we could not accomplish in several hours”. Eventually, with the

Lehi, and later Irgun, fighting house to house and using explosives to demolish entire buildings – with civilians inside – the village slowly began to fall into Israeli hands.

By 11am the battle was over and the attackers were overcome with what Irgun commander Ben-Zion Cohen described as “a desire for revenge”. Many of the villagers were driven into Jewish areas where they were paraded about in a victory parade. They were the lucky ones. Meir Pa’il, who was present for the entire battle, described scenes of guerrillas “full of lust for murder”.¹³

Approximately 120 people were killed but the original death toll, given by Irgun commander Mordechai Raanan was 254, a number which stuck. Raanan later explained that he “told the reporters that 254 were killed so that a big figure would be published, and so that Arabs would panic.” This propaganda measure was used to great effect by Israeli forces. Menachem Begin wrote: “Not what happened at Dir Yassin, but what was invented about Dir Yassin, helped to carve the way to our decisive victories on the battlefield. The legend of Dir Yassin helped us in particular in the saving of Tiberias and the conquest of Haifa...”¹⁴

So why an attack on Deir Yassin? From a military perspective, Deir Yassin was unimportant. It was no threat to the Jewish forces in the area, having declared itself neutral and having in fact provided intelligence to the local Haganah forces. It was not harbouring enemy forces. It was attacked simply because the forces of the Irgun and Lehi wanted somewhere to attack, in order to carry out a joint operation and instil fear in the Palestinian population. Bringing about the removal of the Palestinian population was essential for the establishment of the Israeli state. In 1938, Ben-Gurion stated, “There are two issues here : 1) sovereignty and 2) the removal of a certain number of Arabs, and we must insist on both of them.” When the Arabs proved inconveniently reluctant to simply up and leave, more extreme measures became necessary.

Massacres like Deir Yassin became part of an arsenal of techniques employed by the Israelis to clear Palestine for Jewish settlement. Forced removal, known nowadays, especially when enemies of the West are the perpetrators, as ‘ethnic cleansing’ was to become standard operating procedure in creating what would be later touted as an island of democracy in the Middle East. The official

13. <http://www.deiryassin.org/SAGA.html>, Accessed 4 May 2010.

14. Menachem Begin, *The Revolt, Story of the Irgun*, H. Schuman, 1951, p.165.

History of the Haganah elaborated:

[Palestinian Arab] villages inside the Jewish state that resist 'should be destroyed and their inhabitants expelled beyond the borders of the Jewish state.' Meanwhile, 'Palestinian residents of the urban quarters which dominate access to or egress from towns should be expelled beyond the borders of the Jewish state in the event of their resistance.'¹⁵

Ben-Gurion put the same matter quite bluntly, declaring that "The Arabs of the land of Israel [Palestinians] have only one function left to them – to run away."

The Zionist cause required the establishment of a large Jewish majority in the new country. Ben-Gurion again:

In the area allocated to the Jewish State there are not more than 520,000 Jews and about 350,000 non-Jews, mostly Arabs. Together with the Jews of Jerusalem, the total population of the Jewish State at the time of its establishment, will be about one million, including almost 40% non-Jews. such a [population] composition does not provide a stable basis for a Jewish State. This [demographic] fact must be viewed in all its clarity and acuteness. With such a [population] composition, there cannot even be absolute certainty that control will remain in the hands of the Jewish majority There can be no stable and strong Jewish state so long as it has a Jewish majority of only 60%.¹⁶

Massacre and the instilled fear of massacre has been a part of the Zionist arsenal since before the establishment of Israel. The Israeli state was built on massive repression, terrorising, killing and finally the driving out of over 700,000 Palestinians in order to establish the state in its initial configuration. The expulsion of the Palestinian population and the denial of its right of return were key policies underpinning the establishment of the Zionist state. In 1948 Moshe Sharet explained:

With regard to the refugees, we are determined to be adamant while the war lasts. Once the return tide starts, it will be impossible to stem it, and it will prove our undoing. As for the future, we are equally determined to explore all possibilities of getting rid, once and for all, of the huge Arab minority which originally threatened us. What can be achieved in this period of storm and stress [referring to the 1948 war] will be quite unattainable once conditions get stabilized. A group of people

15. Masalha, p. 178.

16. Efraim Karsh, *Rethinking the Middle East*, Frank Cass, London, 2003, p. 176.

has already started working on the study of resettlement possibilities in other lands . . . What such permanent resettlement of 'Israeli' Arabs in the neighboring territories will mean in terms of making land available in Israel for settlement of our own people requires no emphasis.¹⁷

Despite the multitude of statements by influential Israeli figures, making plain the intent to terrorise Palestinians into leaving, Zionists have consistently argued that the main cause of Arab flight was urging by the Arab governments. In case there is any doubt at all that Palestinians fled as a result of Zionist activity, it is worth noting the study carried out in 1961 by Erskine Childers, an Irish journalist. He questioned the conventional wisdom that the flight of Palestinian refugees in 1948 was the result of radio broadcasts encouraging them to leave by the Arab states and political forces. He went to the British Museum and analysed the records. What he found was not orders to leave but orders to remain. Now even Aryeh Yitzhaki, military historian for the Israel Defense Forces in 1992, has labelled alleged calls by Arab governments for the Palestinians to leave "fabrications". It is only Zionists and those influenced by them who remain wedded to such convenient fictions as Arab governments' calls to flee being the primary cause of the exodus out of Israel.¹⁸

The day the British mandate ended is commemorated every year by the Palestinians as *yawm in nakbah*, the day of the catastrophe, when the process of driving 700,000 people from their land was formalised and that land was turned over to the Zionist state. Much of that land, to which Palestinian families still retain title, was handed over to Jewish immigrants. Josef Weitz, head of the JNF's Land Department, became head of a new organisation, the Transfer Committee, formed at his request for the purposes, in his words, of "evicting as many Arabs as possible".¹⁹

While many Palestinians did as the Zionists wished, and fled their homes, others did try to resist. Arab volunteer fighters made their way into Palestine in the months leading up to the declaration of independence and the day after it was declared, armed forces from surrounding Arab nations invaded the new state.

17. Flapan, p. 105.

18. <http://www.deiryassin.org/op0010.html>, Accessed 4 May, 2010.

19. <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Acre/Palestine-Remembered/Story674.html>, Accessed 4 May, 2010.

But they were hopelessly out-gunned and the Israelis, with the support of both the West and the Soviet Union, easily defeated the poorly led Arab League forces, which had “no common military headquarters, no attempts at coordinating the offensives of the Arab armies, and . . . not even a regular liaison service for sharing enemy intelligence.”²⁰ The Israelis seized the opportunity to turn the war into one of aggression and expansion, rapidly overrunning land in the Palestinian sector to expand their territory by annexing over half of the intended Palestinian state. By the time the war ended, Palestine was a mere twenty-two percent of the whole Mandate area.



Refugee camp following the Nakbah

Within two years, the Jordanian monarchy had annexed the West Bank, while Gaza was ruled by Egypt under the terms of the Israel-Egypt Armistice Agreement, leaving no genuinely independent Palestinian territory. Consequently, throughout the 1950s, Palestinian political aspirations were largely subordinated to the interests of the Arab governments, especially those of Jordan and Egypt.

20. M van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force*, Public Affairs, 2002, p83.

1967 and the expansion of Israel

The next major defeat for the Palestinian people occurred with the further expansion of Israeli territory at their expense in the Six Day War of 1967. Ben Gurion had always seen the continued expansion of Israel as a natural part of the Zionist plan:

Just as I do not see the proposed Jewish state as a final solution to the problems of the Jewish people, so I do not see partition as the final solution of the Palestine question. Those who reject partition are right in their claim that this country cannot be partitioned because it constitutes one unit, not only from a historical point of view but also from that of nature and economy.²¹

He had previously stated that “After the formation of a large army in the wake of the establishment of the [Jewish] state, we shall abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine”. 1967 gave Israel the opportunity to put this plan into effect, as it set about annexing further territory from its neighbours. The war began with air strikes by the Israeli Air Force which destroyed the Egyptian Air Force in surprise attacks while their aircraft were still on the ground. Subsequent attacks the same day destroyed the Jordanian, Syrian and Iraqi Air Forces. The air strikes were followed by rapid strikes into Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and resulted in Israel seizing control of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan River (which together comprise the Occupied Territories of today), and the Golan Heights, which Israel officially annexed in 1982. They annexed East Jerusalem but not the remainder of the Occupied Territories, which would have created demographic problems – a much larger Palestinian population within the borders of Israel.

As they did in the portrayal of the 1948 war, Zionists have always presented this as a case of a fight for survival by beleaguered victims, the Israelis, surrounded by powerful enemies determined to drive them into the sea. However, statements made by the Israeli leadership belie this version of events. Certainly Egypt and Syria had both ordered troops to their borders with Israel, but that did not mean an impending invasion, and the Israeli leadership were well aware of

21. Flapan, p22.

this. The *New York Times* quoted Prime Minister (1977 - 83) Menachem Begin's August 1982 speech saying: "In June, 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that (President Gamal Abdel) Nasser (1956-70) was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him." Two-time Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1974-77 and 1992-95) had actually said more than that when he told French newspaper *Le Monde* in February, 1968: "I do not believe Nasser wanted war. The two divisions which he sent into Sinai on May 14 would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it."²²

Yet the myth that Israel was facing imminent destruction at the hands of an aggressive alliance of Arabs determined to drive the Jews into the sea, has survived almost unchallenged. The Israeli leadership knew it was important to propagate this myth at the time, but it has survived long beyond the 1967 war despite a surprising willingness of the victors to boast about their deceit. General Haim Barlev, then Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) deputy Chief of Staff, told Israeli daily paper *Ma'ariv* in April 1972, "We were not threatened with genocide on the eve of the six-day war, and we had never thought of such a possibility." What is more, the invasions of 1967 were not even a response to Arab troop movements but a culmination of years of planning. General Mordechai Hod, Commander of the Israeli Air Force during the Six-Day War said in 1978 explained, "Sixteen years of planning had gone into those initial eighty minutes. We lived with the plan, we slept on the plan, we ate the plan. Constantly we perfected it."²³ The war had been in planning almost since the establishment of Israel.



Moshe Dayan [centre]

22. John B. Quigley, *Palestine and Israel: a challenge to justice*, Duke University Press, 1990, p. 164.

23. <http://www.zcommunications.org/forty-years-of-occupation-by-stephen-lendman>, Accessed 4 May 2010.

On the Syrian front, Israel was again the aggressor, looking to seize territory it believed should belong to it. After the Israeli attack on Egypt, the Syrians and Jordanians had launched a series of largely ineffective air attacks but had generally acted cautiously. Syria then agreed to a ceasefire but the Israelis invaded the Syrian Golan Heights a mere four hours later. Israeli Defence Minister and war hero Moshe Dayan described Israel's provocations as "snatching bits of territory and holding on to it until the enemy despairs and gives it to us." He elaborated:

After all, I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there started. In my opinion, more than 80 percent, but let's talk about 80 percent. It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow some area where it wasn't possible to do anything, in the demilitarized area, and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until in the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that's how it was. ²⁴



Bulldozing Palestinian homes and fields

By the end of the war, Israel had taken the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank from Jordan, and the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt. Only the Sinai has been returned. The Golan has been incorporated into Israel and Gaza and the West Bank have become the basis of a

fictional non-contiguous future

Palestinian state. The Six Day War was a turning point for many Palestinians. Many had believed that their Arab neighbours, in particular Egypt, with its radical nationalist President Nasser speaking out strongly in favour of Palestinian rights, would deliver their independence for them. After the comprehensive defeat of Syria, Jordan and even Egypt, Palestinians realised that they would need to look to their own resources if liberation was to be achieved.

24. Shlaim, pp. 236-7.

The Establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organisation

In the aftermath of the Nakbah, the Palestinian refugee population scattered into a diaspora, some succeeding in settling in western countries or throughout the Arab world. Others found themselves living in refugee camps, many of which still exist today. In this environment, many disparate resistance movements formed and some of these began taking military action against the new Israeli state. The Palestinians naturally also looked to the existing leadership within the Arab world to act on their behalf to deliver them their liberation. After more than a decade with no signs of real progress, 4222 members of the various groups came together under the auspices of the Arab League conference in Cairo in May 1964 and the Palestine Liberation Organisation was formed out of this meeting. Its objective was to unite the various groups under a single umbrella body.

The PLO's charter was released on May 28 1964 and recognised all of British Mandate Palestine as a single unit and called for the overthrow of the Zionist state and its replacement by a secular state for all, Jew or Palestinian. The largest group within the PLO at its foundation was Al Fatah, headed by Yasser Arafat.

Between 1964 and 1967 the PLO was only nominally independent. Having been formed under the auspices of the Arab League, the movement was effectively under the control of the governments of the Arab countries. It was only after the defeat of Egypt, Syria and Jordan at the hands of the Israelis in the Six Day War that the PLO was able to break free from that domination and begin to operate on its own terms. Arafat was elected chairman of the movement in 1969 and remained in that position until his death in 2004.

The PLO has come under increasing pressure to moderate its stance as Israel has become stronger and this has led to a number of splits or partial withdrawals by various member groups. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and other radical groups temporarily left in 1974 when Al Fatah presented its Ten Point Programme, which they saw as a first step towards the recognition of the right of Israel to exist and the acceptance of a two-state solution. Following the Oslo Accords in 1993, the PLO accepted an increasingly

untenable Palestinian state under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority as the basis for its negotiating position. More recently, Palestinian Authority leaders have even attempted to negotiate away the unalienable right of return of the Palestinian refugees in exchange for a peace based on a Palestinian state comprising the Gaza Strip and the West Bank of the Jordan River. Factions to the left of Al Fatah have condemned these moves.

Palestine Under Siege

In the newly occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jewish/Israeli settlements were established from the 1970s onwards through the confiscation of Arab land. These settlements occupied the best and most strategically significant sites, including hilltops and other vital locations. Water has been diverted from Palestinian land to the new settlements. Olive trees and other economic resources belonging to Palestinians have been destroyed. Palestinians suffer extreme repression from the settlers, including day-to-day harassment and extending to sniper attacks on Palestinians attempting to go about their lives. Settler-only roads now criss-cross the Occupied Territories and IDF checkpoints restrict the movement of Palestinians on a daily basis. It was only the militant resistance of the Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank which prevented the incorporation of these territories within an expanded Israel.

The levels of repression by the Israeli state and the continuing confiscations of Palestinian land by new Jewish-Israeli settlers provoked a massive rebellion by the Palestinian civilian population in 1987, the *intifada* ('Uprising'). Youths with stones fought Israeli soldiers and tanks, barricades went up, workers and small merchants organised general strikes, Israeli products were boycotted and Palestinians refused to pay taxes. As usual the IDF inflicted far more casualties on Palestinians, overwhelmingly civilians, than the Palestinians inflicted on Israeli military forces and civilians. Nearly 1,400 Palestinians were killed by Israeli military forces and a further 115 by Israeli civilians, while Palestinian resisters

killed 91 Israeli civilians and 94 Israeli military personnel.²⁵ This Intifada lasted until 1993.

The *intifada* also saw the rise of Hamas, an Islamic movement with its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist movement in Egypt. Beginning as a charity group with a focus on religious education and welfare provision, Hamas grew rapidly within the vacuum created by disillusionment with the increasing levels of corruption within Fatah.



Israeli forces terrorise Palestinian child

Capitulation by Fatah and the Formation of the Palestinian Authority

In 1988, PLO and Fatah leader Yasser Arafat came out in support of Israel having the right “to exist in peace and security” and declared, “We totally and absolutely renounce all forms of terrorism. . .”²⁶ In the same year, Jordan renounced its claim over the West Bank in favour of the PLO. Along with American diplomacy, this set the stage for the establishment of a kind of Palestinian pseudo-state in the West Bank and Gaza. The Oslo Accords of 1993 were the next step in this process. Then in 1994, Jordan became only the

25. See B'tselem: the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/first_Intifada_Tables.asp

26. Arafat press conference, Geneva, December 14, 1988; cited in *Time* magazine, December 26, 1988. The day before the press conference, Arafat had spoken at the United Nations recognising Israel's right to exist. See also: <http://wrmea.com/backissues/0189/8901005.htm>.

second Arab country to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The PLO, which had been driven out of Jordan in the early 1970s and then out of Lebanon in the early 1980s, and resided in Tunis after that, was able to relocate to the West Bank and Gaza. By this stage, however, the PLO was very different from the revolutionary nationalist movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. The leadership cabal around Arafat had grown rich and corrupt and were no longer interested in leading any kind of struggle against Israel. Rather, they sought an accommodation with the Zionist state which would leave them free to enrich themselves further by running the West Bank and Gaza. Of course, it was the power and sacrifices of the Palestinian resistance, and of the Intifada which Israel found impossible to entirely suppress, which gave Arafat and his cronies any negotiating chips at all.

In 1996, the first elections took place for the Palestine National Authority (PNA), which was to govern the areas not controlled by the Israeli state and settlers in Gaza and the West Bank. They were won by Arafat and Fatah, and Arafat became president until his death in 2004. There was no further presidential election until 2005. During this period, the Second Intifada broke out. In 2000, partly inspired by the Lebanese Islamist Hezbollah movement's defeat of Israel in Lebanon and partly to resist the expansion of the Jewish/Israeli settlements,²⁷ Palestinians rioted, went on strike, confronted Israeli armed forces and the settlers again. About 5,500 Palestinians lost their lives in the Second *Intifada*, and about 1,000 Israelis. Of the almost 3,800 Palestinians killed by Israeli armed forces, nearly 2,200 were not actually taking part in hostilities and in another 880 cases it is simply not known if they were or were not.²⁸ For the Israeli state, being Palestinian is a crime in itself, however. The object is to terrorise the Palestinians into submission, so whether you are resisting them or not is almost immaterial to them.

The 2005 presidential election was won comfortably by Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas, as Hamas did not run and the main opposition candidate, Mustafa Barghouti, who was backed by the PFLP, pulled out. Alienation with Fatah continued to spread due to its leaders' corruption, their dealings with Israel and

27. Although far fewer settler houses were established in the years immediately after Oslo than in the years leading up to the Accords, there was a substantial expansion of the existing settlements as well as 3,500-4,000 new settler homes still being built each year in the late 1990s.

28. See B'tselem: the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories: <http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp>

their use of the armed personnel of the PNA as a kind of proxy for the Israeli state and, as a result, Hamas won the 2006 legislative elections, beating Fatah by 30,000 votes and winning 76 of the 132 seats.

Fatah, Israel and its imperialist backers all refused to accept the Hamas victory. In the West Bank, Fatah expelled Hamas elected legislative council members from the PNA, replacing them with Fatah representatives and independents. The following year Abbas banned the Hamas militia. Hamas responded by driving Fatah out of the Gaza Strip. Israel responded to the Hamas electoral victory by imposing a blockade on Gaza and, at the start of 2009, launching a brutal invasion. The invasion was preceded by a massive bombing campaign, while there had also been smaller Israeli sorties into the Gaza Strip during 2008. In less than three weeks, over 1,400 Palestinians were killed, compared to 13 Israelis. Up to 50,000 Palestinians were left homeless and 400-500,000 without running water.²⁹

The living conditions for Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories are dire. Even before the invasion of the Gaza Strip by Israel in January 2009, unemployment there was forty five percent, with almost all of the factories having closed down in recent years.³⁰ In the West Bank, unemployment is running at around nineteen percent.³¹ In Gaza, GDP per capita is a meagre \$US1,100³² and in the West Bank it is only \$US2,900.³³ In the West Bank, forty six percent of the Palestinian population live below the poverty line,³⁴ while in Gaza it is an astronomical seventy percent.³⁵ By contrast, in Israel unemployment is 7.4 percent and GDP per capita was just under \$US28,500 in 2008, before slipping just \$US200 in 2009 because of the world recession.³⁶ Within Israel, the GDP per capita of “Israeli Arabs” (ie Palestinians who haven’t been driven out) is a mere third of that of Jewish Israelis.³⁷

29. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War; see also: <http://www.btselem.org/english/OTA/?WebbTopicNumber=30&image.x=23&image.y=10>

30. *Haaretz*, July 28, 2008.

31. 2009 estimate, CIA World Factbook.

32. <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=gz&v=67>

33. <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?v=67&c=we&l=en>

34. 2007 estimate, CIA World Factbook.

35. 2009 estimate, CIA World Factbook.

36. [http://www.indexmundi.com/israel/gdp_per_capita_\(ppp\).html](http://www.indexmundi.com/israel/gdp_per_capita_(ppp).html)

37. Roei Nahmias, “GDP per capita of Arab Israelis third of that of Jews”. January 18, 2007, at:

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was formed in the aftermath of the disastrous Six Day War by the left wing of the Palestinian movement who wanted to bring about a secular socialist state in the whole of British Mandate Palestine, a democratic state where all would have equal rights, regardless of religion or gender. It had its origins in the Arab Nationalist Movement, which was formed by George Habash in 1953. The ANM's objective was to bring about a modern socialist Arab nation. After the Six Day War, the ANM merged with two other groups to form the PFLP, which has since retained a highly respected and significant role in the Palestinian resistance and society as a whole.

The founding document of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, penned in December 1967, calls for “revolutionary violence in confronting Zionist violence and reaction”, as the only weapon left to the masses to restore history and progress. It continues; “the slogan of our masses must be Resistance until Victory”.³⁸

But Resistance to what? At its 1969 National Congress the PFLP officially adopted Marxist-Leninist philosophy and began to refer to itself as a “fighting Marxist-Leninist organisation”. At the core of the PFLP's political programme is an assessment which separates the organisation's friends from its enemies. This concept was first articulated in Mao Zedong's 1926 “Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society”. While Mao limited his analysis to conditions within China the PFLP extended it to the rest of the world as it was deemed necessary when analysing their situation. This analysis is detailed in the PFLP's 1969 document, “A Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine” and is worth reviewing if we wish to understand the PFLP as a political entity and to contextualise both its political and military history. Not surprisingly the basic conditions determining this analysis have not changed in over 40 years of the PFLP's existence.

They see Israel as a political, military and economic entity which is inherently racist and which through its policies and actions denies Palestinians

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3354260,00.html>; the source for the figures is a major study, the *Human Development Index of Arab Israelis*, published by the Arab Center for Alternative Planning.

38. <http://www.pflp.ps/english/?q=founding-document-popular-front-liberation-palesti>, Accessed 4 May 2010.



their land, their freedom and their rights. Zionism, says the document, is a racist religious movement, that uses the Israeli state to advance its true agenda, expansionist colonization to create a Jewish homeland in the ancient kingdoms of Samaria and Judea, or modern day Palestine, with no regard for the indigenous population.

It was world imperialism that tore up the carcass of the Ottoman Empire post WWI and distributed the land amongst the Imperialist powers via League of Nations mandates, and seeks to control and influence access to strategic resources in the Middle East. The PFLP has no illusions in

what it calls the reactionary Arab regimes, the governments of those Arab states created by the West at the time of the carve up. It believes they cannot be seen as trustworthy allies of the Palestinian cause, as they defend and protect colonial and capitalist interests in the Middle East and strike at any mass movement which seeks to free the economy from exploitative capitalist influence.

The PFLP's analysis of its enemies provides an explanation of what the Resistance is fighting against, but to understand the PFLP we must look at the second part of the phrase "Resistance until Victory" and analyse what constitutes victory. In the PFLP Political Programme this is clearly defined and the organisation has not deviated from this goal. The PFLP and the Liberation Movement is not "racist or hostile to the Jews", but instead is hostile towards "Zionism as a racist aggressive movement in alliance with Imperialism". Its aim is to "break the Israeli military, political and economic entity", which it believes is based upon "aggression, expansion and organic unity with the interests of Imperialism". The end result would be the "establishment of a national (secular) democratic state in Palestine in which the Arabs and Jews can live as equal citizens with regard to rights and duties".

The PFLP sees that "the link between the interests of imperialism and the continued existence of Israel will make the war against the latter basically



a war against imperialism”, also recognising that “the battle of Palestine today, and all the objective circumstances surrounding it, will make the war a starting point for the attainment of the interconnected aims of the Arab revolution”. This encompasses one of the main guiding ideologies of the Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM) and to a lesser extent the PFLP, Pan- Arabism. The ANM was an ardent supporter of Gamal Abdul Nasser and his Pan-Arab, Anti-Imperialist anti-Western ideology. Leila Khaled, currently a senior member of the PFLP leadership, commented in her autobiography that after Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal on July 26th 1956, people felt that “The Arab giant had suddenly awakened and roared with fury at the West. Mass adulation for Nasser became an Arab phenomenon; Nasserism became a world-wide doctrine”. The ANM was a supporter of and built good relations with Nasser until after the Six Day War when Egypt was defeated by Israel. After the defeat, even though Nasser stayed in power, Egypt began to attempt to normalise relations with Israel and signed a peace treaty in the late 70s.

As we look at some of the key moments in the PFLP’s history, since its formation, it is important to keep their political analysis and aims in mind. On the May 31, 1969, PFLP operatives set off an explosive charge in the Banyas river, heavily damaging a section of the Trans-Arabian pipeline, which was

owned by the Arab-American Oil Company. The pipeline provided “millions of dollars in royalties and transit fees to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.” The PFLP had three main objectives in carrying out the attack:

- By targeting a pipeline owned by a consortium of American companies, the PFLP was indirectly striking at the United States government itself, which it accused of “Leading world imperialism”, and providing “the Israeli enemy with material, political and moral support.”



70,000-strong PFLP rally, Gaza, 2009

- By attacking the pipeline the PFLP was attempting to draw attention to the fact that Israel was permitting the passage

through its territory of petroleum originating in Pro-Western Arab states.

- This constituted a warning to Pro-Western Arab states “against further complicity or participation in this arrangement with Israel.”³⁹

George Habash, the founder and leader of the PFLP was jailed in Syria for this act.

The PFLP shot to international fame when on August 29, 1969 Leila Khaled became the first woman to hi-jack a commercial airliner when she and a fellow revolutionary took over TWA Flight 840 on its way from Rome to Athens. Khaled wrote that she was “on a mission against US imperialism.” She stated that the hijacking was an attempt to:

dramatise our own plight, [acting not with a view to] crippling the enemy because we lack the power to do so, [but to] mobilising our masses, making our cause international, rallying the forces of progress on our side, and underscoring our grievances, before an unresponsive Zionist inspired and Zionist-informed Western public opinion.⁴⁰

39. H. M. Cubert, *The PFLP's Changing Role in the Middle East*, Frank Cass, 1997, p. 136.

40. L Khalid, *My People Shall Live*, http://www.onepalestine.org/resources/articles/My_People_Shall_Live.html, Accessed 3 May 2010.

When the hijacking took place, the pilot was made to fly the plane over Haifa, the Palestinian city where Leila Khaled was born, before landing in Syria, where the passengers were taken off the plane, which was blown up. Khaled and her accomplice immediately gave themselves up to the Syrian police. Eventually they were released without charge and were free to return to the struggle.

The violence involved in blowing up the plane after getting the passengers to disembark is described by Khaled as an attempt to “act ‘violently’ in order to blow the wax out of the ears of the deaf Western liberals and to remove the straws that block their vision”.⁴¹

August 29 was the very same day that then US President Richard Nixon was scheduled to address the 72nd annual meeting of the Zionist Organisation of America. The hijacking was intended to draw international attention to the links between American Imperialism and Zionism and its colonial settler state of Israel. Nixon failed to show at the meeting but sent a message to be read out:

Israel must possess sufficient military power to deter an attack. ‘Sufficient power’ means the balance must be tipped in Israel’s favour. For that reason – to provide Israel a valid self-defence – I support a policy that would give Israel a technological military margin to more than offset her neighbour’s numerical superiority. If maintaining that margin should require that the United States supply Israel with Phantom F4 jets, we should supply those jets.⁴²

This has been a long-time policy of the United States and continues to this day. For instance Barack Obama stated that he “will bring to the White House an unshakable commitment to Israel’s security. That starts with ensuring Israel’s qualitative military advantage.”⁴³ Obama has promised to increase its military aid to Israel to US\$3 billion a year for the next ten years.⁴⁴

In 1970 the PFLP orchestrated the simultaneous hijacking of three airliners, two of which were landed at Dawson’s Field, a disused airfield in Jordan. The third hijacking was foiled, resulting in Leila Khaled being arrested and a Nicaraguan comrade, Patrick Argüello, being shot. One more was hijacked by PFLP sympathisers and taken to Dawson’s Field as an act of solidarity with the

41. Ibid.

42. *New York Times*, September 9, 1968.

43. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/04/us/politics/04text-obama-aipac.html?pagewanted=print>, Accessed 4 May 2010.

44. Ibid.

PFLP. Again all of the planes were blown up in front of the international media, with the stated goal of putting “the general world view on the right track towards an understanding of the Palestinian people”. Leila Khaled explained:

My comrades and I were on our way to Europe to declare international war against the concerted attempts of the superpowers, Zionism, and the Arab states to smash the Arab social revolution and thereby the revolution of the Third World and the oppressed everywhere on this globe. Our minimum objective was the inscription of the name of Palestine on the memory of mankind. We were out to strike at the heart of the oppressor.⁴⁵

George Habash believed that high ethical and political standards should inspire any political and military action. This included the hi-jacking of El Al airliners, which Habash considered a military target. He wished to highlight

...the ways in which this company differs from other civilian transport companies, and places itself, its aircraft, and its pilots within the framework of a strategic reserve for the Israeli air force. El Al’s other activities in this vein involve special secret flights, under the auspices of the Israeli Defence Ministry, during which it has transported pilots training to fly phantom combat aircraft in preparation for surprise attacks and new aggression against Arab states.⁴⁶



Leila Khaled

45. Khaled.

46. Cubert, p134.

The blowing up of the planes was intended to send a message to the governments of Switzerland, Germany and Britain who were holding seven militants including Leila Khaled who had been captured during the second hijack attempt. Leila Khaled was released by Britain in a hostage exchange despite massive pressure from the United States and Israel.

More recently on October 17 2001 the PFLP assassinated the Israeli Tourism Minister, Rehavam Ze'evi. This assassination was a response to the murder of the then-General Secretary of the PFLP, Abu Ali Mustafa, who was killed in a "targeted assassination" by two rockets fired from an Israeli helicopter as he sat at his desk in Ramallah on August 27, 2001. Ze'evi was targeted due to his particularly extreme Zionist attitude towards the Palestinians. He publicly advocated the population transfer of 3.3 million Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to Arab nations. According to him, this could be accomplished by making the lives of Palestinians so miserable that they would relocate. After the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Ze'evi advocated the expulsion of Palestinians to the east side of the Jordan River, where they could serve as a human shield should the Iraqi Army seek to attack Israel.



The separation wall: annexing Palestinian land

In a radio interview in July, 2001, Ze'evi claimed that 180,000 Palestinians worked and lived illegally in Israel, then referred to them as “a cancer” and said that “We should get rid of the ones who are not Israeli citizens the same way you get rid of lice”. Ze'evi believed that Israel's more than 1 million Arab (mainly Palestinian) citizens should not be allowed to vote because they do not serve in the army. He also wanted Israel to lay claim to the country of Jordan because it allegedly belonged to the ancient tribes of Israel.

After the assassination of Rehavam Ze'evi, the PFLP experienced a massive surge of support in the Occupied Territories as Abu Ali Mustafa had been seen as one of the key leaders of the Second Intifada; certainly the PFLP advocated the escalation of the Intifada in response to the continued attempts by Israel and the US to impose the “Peace Process”. George Habash, PFLP co-founder, stated that the Oslo Accords represented

...the biggest blow to the Palestinian national struggle in its history because it does not provide answers regarding the issues of the settlements, Jerusalem and the Palestinians in the Diaspora, and it means the total collapse of the PLO leadership because of that plan.⁴⁷

In the PFLP's 6th Conference Document, *Toward a New Political Vision*, released in July 2000, the Popular Front describes Oslo as:

... a policy (that) is applying the philosophy of power as a basis for international relations. The foundation of this philosophy is the right of the triumphant to dictate his conditions on the defeated. . . The developments of recent years have disclosed the objectives, targets and manifestations of the American Israeli peace project which are limited to launching an intensive campaign to achieve the very same targets which have accompanied it ever since its beginnings namely, hegemony, political domination, the annexation of the Arab world economically, the liquidation of the Palestinian problem through a political war, mixed if necessary, with political and economic violence and organized military pressure.”⁴⁸

Ahmad Sa'adat, the current General Secretary of the PFLP, opposed the new “Road Map” for peace proposed by the Quartet – the USA, EU, UN and

47. Ibid, p. 87.

48. <http://www.pflp.ps/english/?q=sixth-conference-popular-front-liberation-palestin>, Accessed 21 April, 2010.

Russia – from his prison cell, on the grounds that it is designed solely to provide security for Israel’s occupation and criminalize opposition to it as terrorism. This relates to the fact that the “Road Map” was split into three phases that could only progress when requirements were met specifically by the Palestinians. Specifically, he noted that “[p]rogress was linked to ending the intifada and all acts of resistance, rather than ending the occupation or reversing decades of colonial impoverishment of land, resources and institutions.” The PFLP sentiments were echoed by renowned international scholar Edward Said who described the “Peace Process” as “a betrayal of our history and our people.”⁴⁹

Some of the main issues regarding the Madrid Conference and the ensuing Oslo Accords are; that the Accords (Declaration of Principles) were signed without the approval or ratification of the PLO and with no public consultation or debate. In his speech on the White House lawn, PLO leader Yasser Arafat retrospectively condemned Palestinian violence and resistance as terrorism, while making absolutely no mention of 60 years of Israeli oppression and occupation. Arafat’s ‘diplomacy’ gained recognition for the PLO by Israel and the US and a transformation of Arafat from vilified ‘evil terrorist’ to ardent peacemaker. The initial accords, and the “Road Map” for that matter, left the major issues till “Final Status Negotiations”, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the status of illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories, Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, borders of Palestinian sovereignty, the Palestinian right to self determination and finally access to Arab resources in the West Bank such as water.

The differences and contradictions between the PFLP and Fatah were highlighted in 1974 when the PFLP formed the Rejectionist Front with other left groups from the PLO after Fatah formulated the “Ten Point Program”, which was seen as the first step towards the recognition of Israel. The PLO’s subsequent entry into direct negotiations with Israel violated the PFLP’s most fundamental principle of neither recognising nor dealing with the enemy. This caused it to leave the PLO and form the Alliance of Palestinian Forces in 1993, which this time included both secular and Islamist forces like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

49. S. Farsoun & C. Zacharia, *Palestine and the Palestinians*, Westview Press, 1998, p. 225.

In *Palestine and the Palestinians, a political and social history of Palestine*, Farsoun and Aruri state that “in one sense, the PFLP and its leader, Habash, have been the ‘conscience’ of the Palestinian Liberation movement”, continuing that Fatah have “given up on the revolution”, are “tired of armed struggle” and “have come under the influence of the Palestinian bourgeoisie and its Arab allies.”⁵⁰ Thus they conclude that Fatah “has developed a stake in the Arab state system, and has begun to seek a diplomatic solution from a weak and disadvantaged position.” The PFLP’s own analysis of Fatah accords with Farsoun and Aruri’s analysis:

The petit bourgeoisie will not join an organisation committed to scientific socialism and strong political organisation. Thus it will join those Palestinian organisations which raise general liberal slogans, avoid clarity in thinking and analysis of class structure, and exist in an organisational form that does not require of the petit bourgeoisie more than its capacity. In other words, the petit bourgeoisie will fill, in the first place, the ranks of El-Fatah and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).⁵¹

The Alliance of Palestinian Forces provides us with an insight into another facet of the PFLP’s political programme – the unity of Palestinian forces in the face of occupation. For the PFLP this includes the Islamic forces, “because the political Islamic forces constitute a natural component of the Palestinian national movement, regardless of any other peculiarity they have”. They argue that the relationship with the Islamist organisations is based on “unity in conflict, the law that must regulate the relations among the national forces of the Palestinian people.” They continue, “The relations with the political Islamic forces are dynamic and dialectical according to the contradictions with the socio-political situation.” However, “the characteristic of these relations in this stage is that there are intersections at the highest point of the political levels because together with the political Islamic forces we are in the opposition of and confrontation to the American-Israeli settlement.”

On the 39th anniversary of the founding of the PFLP, December 11,

50. S. K. Farsoun & N Aruri, *Palestine and the Palestinians, a political and social history of Palestine*, Westview Press, 2006, p. 192.

51. Khaled.

2006, Palestinian Unity was outlined and given high importance in their political statement. It called for all Palestinian forces to “re-establish their basic commitment to the highest national interest, to steer away from political party factionalism and sectarianism, and to move towards establishing a true national unity based on proportional representation on the ground.” The essence of this unity is to be based on the following factors: the reactivation and re-establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, the importance of continuing all forms of resistance, including military resistance, until the occupation is ended, to NOT accept that negotiation with the enemy is the only strategic method to confront the occupation, and finally the importance of forming an actual, national unity government based on the political program of the Palestinian National Consensus Document (*Al wathiqat alwifaq alwatani*).

The Americans and Israel understand the danger that a unified Palestinian Front could cause and have actively attempted to derail Palestinian Unity talks in Cairo. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has demanded that “any Unity government must recognise Israel’s right to exist and abide by past agreements like Oslo”. Obama demands that the international isolation of Hamas continue until they renounce ‘terrorism’ and recognise Israel’s right to exist. Palestinian violence in response to over sixty years of oppression, violence (both economic and military) and colonialism is condemned (even by Arafat in his last years) as ‘terrorism’, while Israeli violence is justified as self-defence. In line with this mentality peace agreements are hinged on Palestinians first lowering their weapons as though this situation has come about due to Palestinian violence. No such pre-condition is placed on Israel.

The PFLP are a legitimate political organisation who received approximately 40,000 votes in 2006 making them the third largest party behind Fatah and Hamas. The PFLP holds 50 seats on city councils and is the largest party in the governing city of Ramallah. Currently the PFLP also holds the mayor’s office in Bethlehem. Since the 1980s the PFLP has been active in building popular organisations in the fields of health, women’s rights, agriculture and the workers’ movement.

It is not simply the use of violence that determines whether any given act is terrorism, it is also the context within which the act is carried out – resistance is not terrorism. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine is currently listed as a Foreign Terrorist Organisation (FTO) in North America and the European

Union, and is considered an illegal terrorist group in Israel. The current General Secretary of the PFLP, Ahmad Sa'adat, is serving a 30-year prison sentence in Israel for heading an "illegal terrorist organisation". The Palestinians have the inalienable right to fight for their freedom and it is the duty of socialists around the world to support that struggle.

One state or two?

Almost all discussion of the Israel/Palestine conflict in the media relates in some way to peace talks and whether or not a specific incident or activity, be it an IDF missile strike or tank incursion into Gaza, a Palestinian rocket attack on Sderot, or the announcement of more Jewish-only housing or settlement building on Palestinian land, will derail the peace process. The key principle in such a peace process is acceptance by Israel and the Palestinian Authority of a plan for two states; a secure Israel within recognised borders and an independent Palestine. The idea that a two state solution is possible is however a disingenuous one on the part of Israel and its imperialist backers. Firstly, Israel has made it abundantly clear since its inception that Palestinians have no place in its plans for a Jewish homeland, and that that homeland includes all of British Mandate Palestine and more besides. Secondly, because Israel has so completely dominated the Palestinian territory for the last sixty years, and shows no sign of relinquishing that control, the imbalance between a Palestinian state and the Israeli state is so great as to be untenable. As Moshe Machover, a Jewish anti-Zionist and Marxist activist has noted:

Indeed no genuine resolution is possible in the short or medium term, because of the enormous disparity in the balance of power. The Palestinians, economically shattered, lightly armed and enjoying little effective international support, are facing a dominant modern capitalist Israel, a regional hegemonic nuclear super-power, a local hatchet man and junior partner of the global hyper-power. So long as such gross imbalance of power persists, any settlement will inevitably impose harsh oppressive conditions on the weaker side. To expect anything else would be wildly unrealistic.⁵²

52. <http://lists.fahamu.org/pipermail/debate-list/2009-March/020792.html>, accessed 21 April,

Furthermore, a two-state solution would ensure the continued denial of the basic rights of the Palestinian people. A key demand of the Palestinian movement since the Nakbah in 1948 has been the right of return of those refugees who were forced to leave, and their descendants. This is a fundamental human right which the overwhelming majority of Palestinians consider non-negotiable. A Palestinian state based on the Occupied Territories, as proposed by the various peace plans, would be a negation of that basic right. It also permanently denies the rights of those Palestinians who live within the borders of Israel. The militant Palestinian movement, both secular and religious, rejects the formalising of the existing partition, and will not consider negotiations on that basis. The current PFLP position is that, while they will not negotiate over a two-state solution, the existence of a democratic Palestinian state could give their people some relief from the constant oppression that they currently suffer, and serve as a springboard to move toward their ultimate goal of a secular state in all of historic Palestine. Ahmad Sa'adat, in a recent letter from his prison cell in Asqelan, wrote:

The slogan of "two states for two peoples" that are being voiced only opens the door to the acceptance of Israel as a "Jewish state," which threatens not only our right to return, but also the existence of the masses of our people in the occupied part of Palestine 1948 on the ground where they were born and where they have remained firmly rooted and strong in the land.⁵³

Unsurprisingly, given their origins within the Arab National Movement, they regard the possibility for victory for the struggle as being completely entwined with the victory of democratic socialist revolution throughout the wider Arab world. The revolution cannot succeed without the support of revolutionary masses and hopefully revolutionary governments in the major Arab countries, which would create the necessary conditions for the Israeli working class to break with their ruling class. Therefore the PFLP see their struggle as being a key element within the greater revolutionary struggle throughout the Arab world to create a democratic socialist Arab state, within which Palestine can take its place.

2010.

53. See: <http://www.freeahmadsaadat.org/june109.html>, Accessed 21/4/2010.

What New Zealanders can do

In New Zealand today, there is less uncritical support for Israel than has been the case in the past. In society as a whole and in the media, there is now a greater recognition of the plight of the Palestinian people than ever before. This is certainly progress. However, there is little sign of this having converted into support for the Palestinian people's right to actually struggle for their own liberation. The Palestinian solidarity movement tends to restrict itself to sympathy for the suffering of the Palestinians and a wish for peace in the region.



At its best, this movement does good work in highlighting the injustices suffered by the Palestinians, and development agencies fund projects in the Occupied Territories which do bring assistance to struggling communities. At its worst, it takes the form of witness-bearing and vigil holding, which does more for the aggrieved consciences of the participants than it does for the Palestinian people.

It is the Palestinian people themselves who will bring about their liberation

so for people living in distant regions of the world, it is important that our solidarity with the Palestinians takes a form that actually supports their struggle, rather than simply making us feel better.

The Workers Party has decided that a good, practical way to support the Palestinian struggle is to offer concrete solidarity with and support for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. To achieve this, we have established the PFLP Solidarity Campaign. While it was initiated by the WPNZ, it's open to anyone who wants to be involved in a practical project to give real tangible support to the struggle for a genuine peace, underpinned by democratic secular socialist principles of justice and freedom.

The campaign raises awareness of the role that progressive Palestinians are taking in the fight to achieve their own liberation and aims to raise the consciousness of New Zealanders, especially New Zealand workers, of the progressive struggle for liberation taking place in the Middle East, a region which is often described as mired in intractable religious conflict. The campaign also raises money for the PFLP to use in its struggle by selling PFLP items and sending all the proceeds directly to the Popular Front with no strings attached. The PFLP Solidarity Campaign can be contacted at <http://wpnz-pflp-solidarity.blogspot.com/>. Buy a PFLP t-shirt or badge; better still, get involved in the campaign.

Why you should join the Workers Party

1. We are revolutionary socialists

We all live in a capitalist society, which means that the working-class majority experience exploitation and poverty in order to guarantee profits and luxury for the ruling-class minority. The capitalists have many weapons at their disposal – not just the army, police, courts and prisons, but a system of ideas, developed over centuries, that shape people’s beliefs about what is normal, natural, and possible. These prevailing ideas tell us that we can do no more than tinker with the current system. However, the current economic crisis shows more clearly than ever that society must be radically reorganised if it is to serve the interests of the working-class majority. To challenge the entrenched power of the ruling class, workers cannot rely on parliament or parties like Labour, which support the existing system. We need to build a movement which can develop alternative, anti-capitalist ideas to create a revolution.

2. We support workers’ resistance

The fundamental basis of our politics is class struggle. For us, socialism – a society in which the means of producing wealth are owned collectively and run democratically for the benefit of everyone – can only come about when we, the people who produce the wealth, liberate ourselves from capitalist exploitation. The Workers Party does everything it can to support all workers’ struggles – from the smallest work stoppage to a full-on factory occupation – as these are the basic forms of resistance to capitalist rule. As workers start running their workplaces and industries on their own, they will start to ask, “Why can’t we run the whole country – and more?” We take inspiration from historical examples of workers’ control such as the Paris Commune and the Russian Revolution, and study their successes and failures.

3. We support trade union activism

Because we believe that only the working class can create socialism, we are active in the basic organisations of the

working class, the trade unions. Currently, unions are generally dominated by middle-class bureaucrats who see themselves as peacemakers between workers and bosses. We work towards transforming unions into strong, democratic, fighting organisations, controlled by their members. Such unions will mobilise workers for struggle in the workplace and society through strikes, workplace occupations and other forms of militant action. In an economic crisis they are more important than ever. We join in the struggle to extend the union movement to the majority of workers who are not yet organised, especially the campaigns by Unite Union to involve youth and workers who have insecure conditions. We stand with workers in struggle for better rights and conditions, and initiate discussion on revolutionary ideas through strike bulletins and electronic media.

4. We support student-worker solidarity

On campus and in schools, Workers Party members are actively trying to rebuild the radical student movement. We oppose fees, demand living grants for students, and fight for free speech. We encourage students to link their struggles with those of the working class. Workers ultimately pay most of the bill for education, even in a semi-

private university system such as we have. Workers will be won to the idea of free education from kindergarten to university if they see students willing to support their struggles.

5. We have an internationalist perspective

Workers all over the world have far more in common with one another than with the bosses of “their own” country. To fight effectively, workers in every country must support the struggles of workers in every other country. This is what we mean by internationalism. We are for open borders as the best way to unite the workers of the world. We have been involved in successful campaigns to prevent the deportation of refugees and we urge the union movement to be migrant-worker friendly. We oppose the reactionary nationalism of campaigns like “Buy NZ-made”, and instead advocate protecting jobs through militant unionism.

6. We oppose imperialism

The fight against imperialism is a vital part of the fight against capitalism. Imperialism is the system whereby rich countries dominate poor ones. New Zealand is a junior partner in the world

imperialist system. The Workers Party opposes any involvement in imperialist wars such as those being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq, even if the involvement is under the banner of so-called “peace-keeping”. We demand an immediate end to the interference in the affairs of Pacific Island nations by New Zealand and its ally Australia. We want an end to all involvement in imperialist military alliances and the dismantling of their spy bases. We try to identify the most politically progressive anti-imperialist groups to offer them our active support – for instance, our solidarity campaign for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

7. We fight oppression

We are serious about actively fighting oppression based on nation, race, gender or sexuality – here and now, not just “after the revolution”. But we believe class is central to all such oppression, and therefore those struggles are linked to the broader class struggle. We support militant direct action by Maori for real equality; conversely, we see the Treaty process as a bureaucratic means to undercut such resistance and nurture a Maori middle class which will benefit very few.

8. We stand for freedom

We believe that socialism means the maximum possible freedom for the many not the few. We directly challenge infringements on basic human rights such as the undemocratic use of trespass orders by universities and employers against activists and trade unionists. We have consistently opposed the so-called “terror raids” on left-wing and Maori activists dating from October 2007. We also practise what we preach in our own party, where members have the right to disagree and debate their differences, provided they are involved in a basic level of party activity.

9. We hold capitalism responsible for the environmental crisis

The capitalist drive for unlimited profit threatens to destroy the whole basis of life on Earth. In contrast to the capitalist parties (including the Green Party) who demand that workers reduce their living standards for the sake of the planet, we say that it is the capitalist system that must be challenged, since most environmental damage is a result of production, not consumption. We look to examples of working-class actions like the “green bans” initiated by New South Wales building labourers in the 1970s for inspiration on how workers can change the priorities of society.

10. We are building a revolutionary party

We believe that the working class and oppressed can only achieve liberation as a conscious project, based on ideas which are debated, tested against reality, and constantly reviewed and improved. The working class can only learn from history – including previous workers' struggles, victorious or defeated – through a conscious political movement which preserves these lessons. To create a mass socialist movement, workers who have already drawn revolutionary conclusions must organise together in a political organisation. This kind of party is still some way off in New Zealand. But we believe that Workers Party activists and our political ideas will be central to that movement of the future. Help us build it now! Our members and supporters in the trade unions, the student movement, and many other struggles organise together, on the basis of common ideas, as part of a concerted fight for a classless society without oppression or exploitation. If you agree with our basic ideas, join us. If you don't, work with us, debate with us, and continue the discussion!



You can now actively support the Palestinian Resistance by buying one of our shirts, with all proceeds going to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a group actively involved politically and militarily resisting Imperialism and Zionism in the occupied territories.

<http://wpnz-pflp-solidarity.blogspot.com/>

www.workersparty.org.nz

The Workers Party website is where you'll find interesting commentary on a daily basis, and in-depth articles posted several times a week.

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