

Palestine

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

A Ramparts Press Reader

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6. Towards a Democratic State in Palestine

Fateb

The following document represents Fateb's most mature and comprehensive statement concerning the liberated Palestine for which the movement is fighting. Ironically, it was presented on the eve of the civil war in Jordan, in September 1970, at the Second World Congress on Palestine, held in Amman under the auspices of the General Union of Palestinian Students. The full text was carried in the United States by Liberation News Service in their bulletin of October 15, 1970.

The Palestine Revolution and the Jews

It is almost a year since the Palestine liberation movement, Fateh, declared officially and for the first time, a political program spelling out the ultimate objective of the liberation struggle. The declaration stated: "We are fighting today to create the new Palestine of tomorrow; a progressive, democratic and non-sectarian Palestine in which Christian, Moslem and Jew will worship, work, live peacefully and enjoy equal rights." The statement added, "Our Palestinian revolution still stretches its welcoming hand to all human beings who want to fight for, and live in, a democratic, tolerant Palestine, irrespective of race, color or religion."

The statement was repeated, explained and amplified by Fateh representatives in every international gathering attended by a Fateh delegation. The official spokesman of Fateh, Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat], was quoted by several journalists as saying that "once we defeat the enemy and liberate Palestine we will create a home for all of us."

Abu Eyad, one of the leaders of Fateh, stated in a long interview with the editor of *al-Taleea* (June 1969) that the Palestinian revolution condemns persecution of human beings and discrimination in any shape or form and that Fateh would help Jews anywhere if they faced persecution at the hands of racists. Abu Eyad said that he would be willing to give these Jews arms and fight with them.

This was not just a fantastic propaganda claim; it was put into effect a few weeks later when Fateh students protected a Jewish professor, Eli Lobel, in Frankfurt, Germany, from assault and attempted murder at the hands of Zionist German thugs last July. Fateh protected Jewish members of Matzpen [the Israeli Socialist Organization] in Germany after their lives were threatened in the same incident.

Profile of a Democratic Palestine

Difficulties and Limitations. It is quite difficult and risky at this early stage of the revolution to make a clear and definitive statement about the new liberated Palestine. Realism, rather than romantic daydreaming, should be the basic revolutionary approach. We do not believe that victory is around the corner. The revolution does not underestimate the enemy or its imperialist allies. What will happen during the years of hard struggle for liberation cannot be easily predicted.

Will the attitude of Palestinian Jews harden, or become more receptive and flexible? A further drift to the right, the stepping up of anti-Arab terrorism—in the Algerian O.A.S.

tradition—followed by a voluntary mass exodus on the eve of liberation would pose a completely different problem and would be quite regrettable.

On the other hand, joining the revolution and working with it will lay firmer ground for the new Palestine. The revolution is striving hard to achieve the second alternative.

Guerrilla operations are basically directed at the military and economic foundations of the Zionist settler-state. Whenever a civilian target is chosen, every effort is made to avoid the loss of civilian life—though one would find it hard to distinguish civilians and non-civilians in this modern spartan society where every adult is mobilized for the war. Hitting quasi-civilian areas aims at the psychological effect of shocking the Israelis into realizing that the racist-militaristic state cannot provide them with security when it is conducting genocide against the exiled and oppressed Palestinian masses.

In the Dizengoff Street bomb (Tel Aviv), Fateh guerrillas delayed the operation three times to choose a place (in front of a building under construction) and time (12:30 A.M.) to maximize noise but to minimize casualties. The result: few were injured, but thousands were shocked and made to engage in serious rethinking.

In conclusion, despite all uncertainties, there is the hope, the vision and the behavior of the Palestinian revolutionaries, designed to achieve a better future for their oppressed country. Answers must be thought out and found for myriad questions relating to this future. Even if the answers are tentative, they will start a dialogue which provides the road towards maturity and fulfillment.

1. *The Country.* Pre-1948 Palestine—as defined during the British mandate—is the territory where the democratic, progressive state is to be created. The liberated Palestine will be part of the Arab homeland and will not be another alien state within it. The eventual unity of Palestine with other Arab

states will make boundary problems less relevant and will end the artificiality of the present state of Israel, and possibly that of Jordan as well.

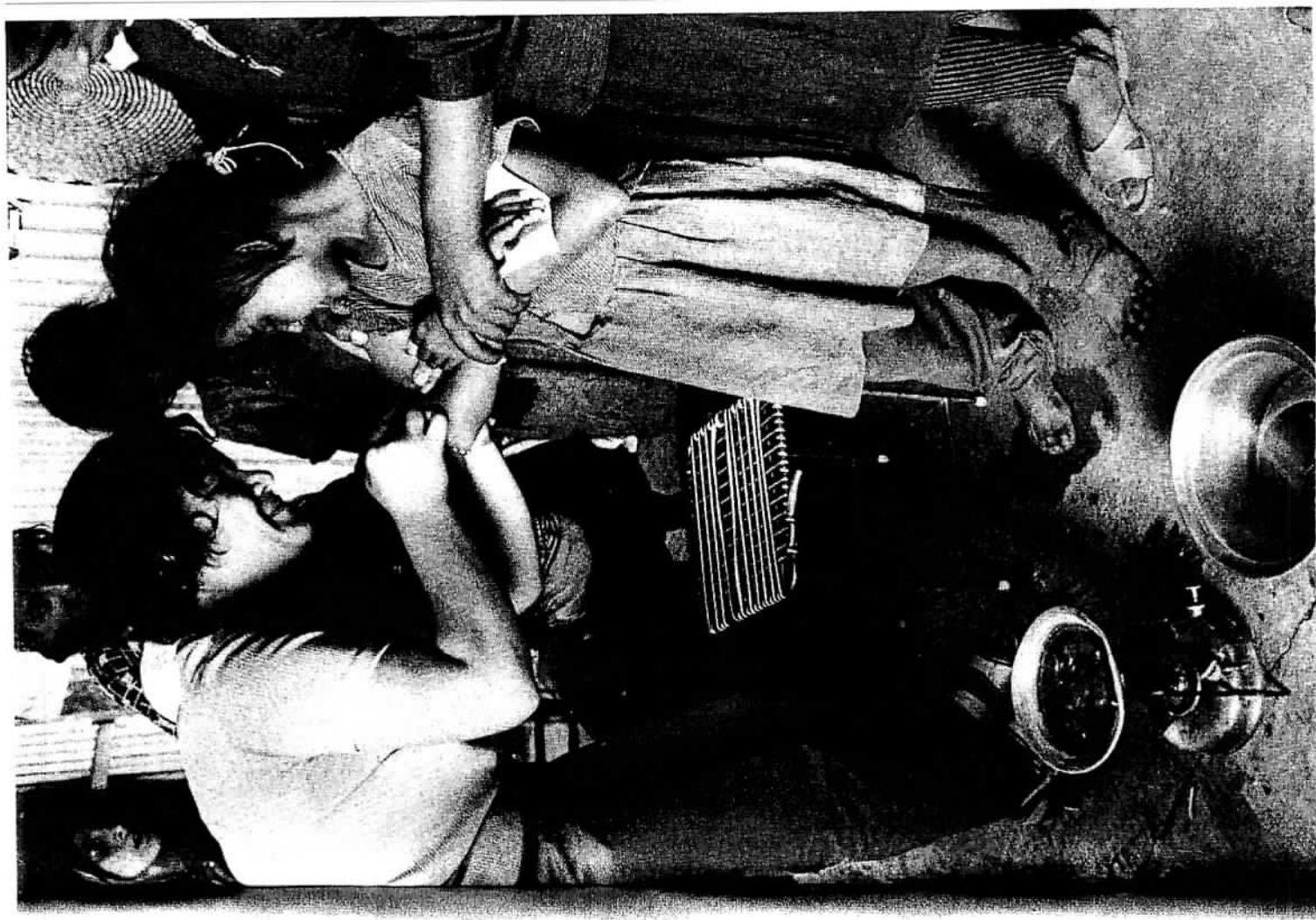
The new country will be anti-imperialist and will join the ranks of progressive revolutionary countries. Therefore, it will have to cut the present life-links with, and the total dependence on, the United States. Therefore, integration within the area will be the foremost prerequisite.

It should be quite obvious at this stage that the new Palestine discussed here is not the occupied West Bank or the Gaza strip or both. These are areas occupied by the Israelis since June 1967. The homeland of the Palestinians usurped and colonized in 1948 is no less dear or important than the part occupied in 1967.

Besides, the very existence of the racist oppressor state of Israel, based on the expulsion and forced exile of part of its citizens, is unacceptable to the revolution in even one tiny Palestinian village. Any arrangement accommodating the aggressive settler-state is unacceptable and temporary. Only the people of Palestine—its Jews, Christians and Moslems—in a country that combines them all is permanent.

2. *The Constituents.* All the Jews, Moslems and Christians living in Palestine or forcibly exiled from it will have the right of Palestinian citizenship. This guarantees the right of all exiled Palestinians to return to their land whether they have been born in Palestine or in exile and regardless of their present nationality.

Equally, this means that all Jewish Palestinians—at the present, Israelis—have the same right, provided, of course, that they reject Zionist racist chauvinism and fully agree to live in the new Palestine as Palestinians. The revolution therefore rejects the supposition that only Jews who lived in Palestine prior to 1948 or prior to 1914 and their descendants are acceptable. After all, Moshe Dayan [minister of defense] and Yigal Allon [deputy minister] were born in Palestine before



1948 and they—with many of their colleagues—are diehard racist Zionists who obviously do not qualify for a Palestinian status; whereas newcomers may be anti-Zionists and work ardently for the creation of a new Palestine.

In the interview referred to earlier, Abu Eyad, one of the officials of Fatch, reasserted that not only progressive Jews but even present Zionists willing to abandon their racist ideology will be welcome as Palestinian citizens. It is the belief of the revolution that the majority of the present Israeli Jews will change their attitudes and will subscribe to the new Palestine, especially after the oligarchic state machinery, economy and military establishment are destroyed.

3. *The Ideology.* The Palestinians, in the process of and at the time of liberation, will decide on the system of government and on the political-economic-social organization of their liberated country. (It should be repeated at this juncture that the term Palestinians includes those in exile and under occupation and Jewish settlers.) A democratic and progressive Palestine, however, rejects by elimination a theocratic, a feudalist, an aristocratic, an authoritarian, or a racist-chauvinist, form of government. It will be a country that does not allow oppression or exploitation of any group of people by any other group or individual; a state that provides equal opportunities for its people in work, worship, education, political decision-making, and cultural and artistic expression.

This is no utopian dream, for the very process of achieving the new Palestine inherently produces the requisite climate for its future system of government—i.e., a people's war of liberation brings out new values and attitudes that serve as guarantees for democracy after liberation.

Witness changing attitudes toward collective work in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. Palestinians and other sisters and brothers joining them in volunteer work and liveli-



hoods. They are not exploited or enslaved labor. The values of human life change. Unlike Israeli napalm raids and indiscriminate killing, Palestinian guerrillas kill sparingly and selectively.

New forms of human relations emerge. No master-slave relation can be attained among fighters for freedom. Increasing awareness of the international dimensions of their problems and discovery of who backs the oppressor and who supports the oppressed create new responsibilities to the international community, especially to the supporters of liberation and democracy.

Therefore, Palestinians after liberation will not accept subjugation from anybody and will not reintroduce oppression against any group, for this would be a negation of their *raison d'être* and an abdication of their revolutionary existence.

This is quite obvious in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon. After twenty-two years of oppression, humiliation and manipulation by secret police and local exploiters, the exiles have awakened to the revolution. In the process, the exiles have broken their bonds, have thrown out the secret police and its spies and allied exploiters and have instituted democratic self-management.

Medical, educational and social services are being provided locally through the revolutionary organizations in a self-help fashion that has brought back dignity and self-respect. Crime rates in these camps have drastically gone down to 10 percent of their prerevolutionary magnitude. Self-discipline has replaced the police. The new militia is providing the link between the revolutionary avant-garde and the mass base. Democratic checks are built in. These Palestinians will not accept oppression and subjugation from anybody and will not enforce it on anybody else.

Newsmen and other foreign visitors have discovered that nowhere in the Arab world can they find people as mature

and tolerant vis-à-vis the Jews as in the camps of Jordan and Lebanon, and especially among the *ashbal*: the "young tigers."

These young Palestinians (eight to sixteen years old) are almost totally free of any anti-Jewish biases. They have a clearer vision of the new democratic Palestine than that held by bourgeois city dwellers. These young people are the liberators of tomorrow. They will complete the destruction of Israeli oppression and the rebuilding of the new Palestine.

If the democratic and progressive new Palestine is utopia, then the Palestinian guerrillas and camp dwellers are starting to practice it.

The Transition and After

It is quite logical to expect specific transitional collective accommodations immediately after liberation, and even a few remaining in the normalized permanent state, i.e., some collective or group privileges besides the purely individual privileges. Jews—or non-Jews, for that matter—would have the right to practice their religion and develop culturally and linguistically as a group, besides their individual political and cultural participation. It seems quite logical, for example, to have both Arabic and Hebrew as official languages taught in government schools to all Palestinians, Jews or non-Jews.

The right of free movement within the country and outside it would be guaranteed. Palestinians desirous of voluntarily leaving the country would be allowed to do so. Immigration would be restricted in a transitional period to the return of all exiled Palestinians desirous of return. In a normal permanent state, however—subject to agreed-upon regulations and the absorptive capacity of the country—immigration would be open without discrimination. Freedom of access, visits, extended pilgrimages and tourism would be guaranteed—subject of course to the normal regulation—to all

Jews, Moslems and Christians of the world who consider Palestine a holy place worthy of pilgrimage and meditation.

Is the New Palestine Viable?

Several well-intentioned critics maintain that even if the creation of the democratic Palestine is possible, it will not survive for long. Their basic contention is that the population and cultural balance will heavily favor the Jews in the new Palestine. This—in their argument—will lead either to an explosive situation or to the domination of the new Palestine by the Jews and a possible reversion to a neo-Zionist state in disguise.

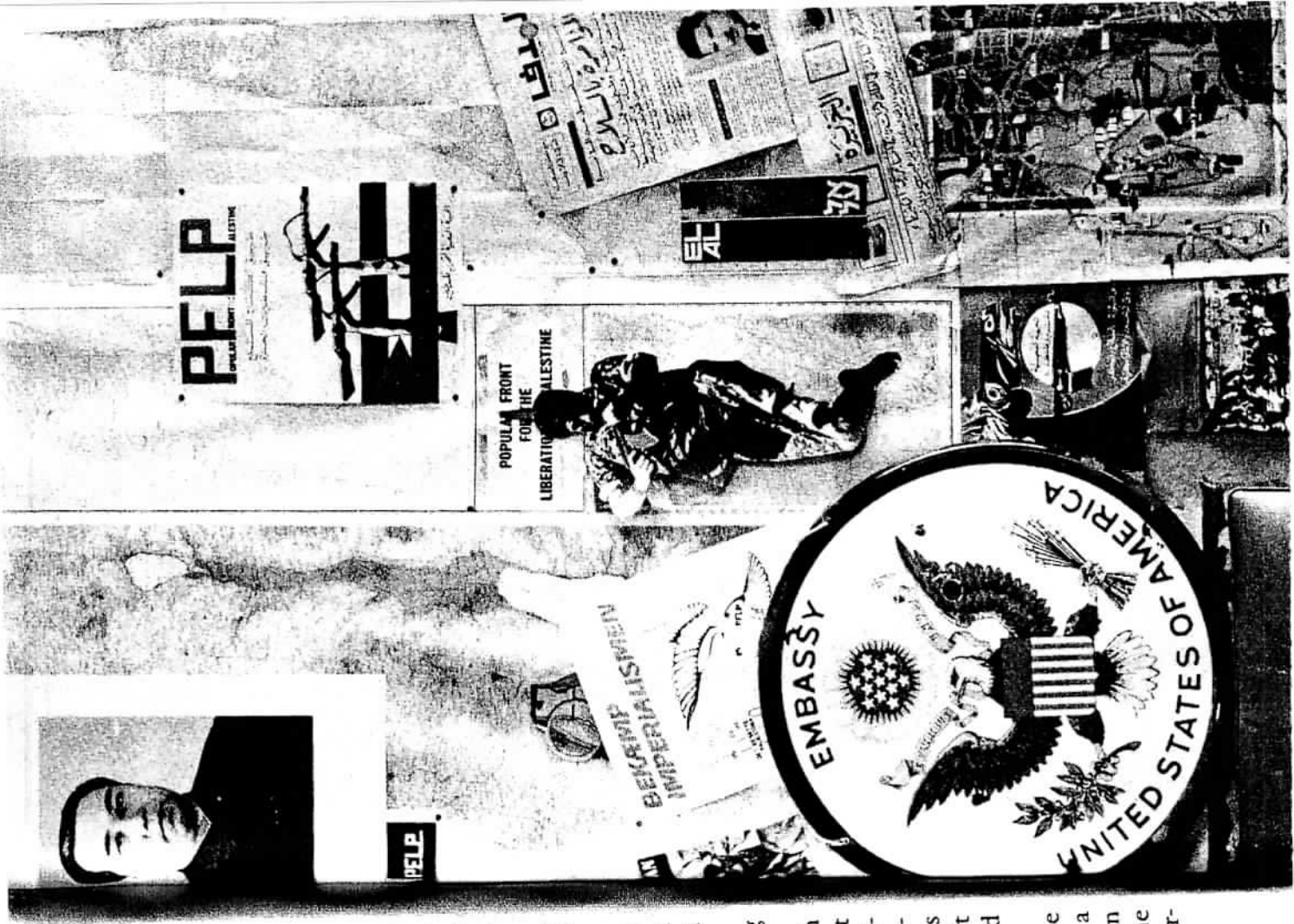
The argument is serious and looks quite plausible given the present set-up and the European dichotomy of the "Arabs" as a backward group and the "Jews" as a modern one.

As for population, the Jews in Palestine today number 2.5 million compared to 2.6 million Palestinian Arabs (Christian and Moslem) in the occupied territories before 1967 and in exile.

Birth rates and net natural growth rates are higher among Arab Palestinians than among the Jews in Palestine.

Immigration, however, has been the major cause of growth in the Jewish ranks. Nevertheless one must consider the fact that 250,000 Jews have permanently left Palestine (emigrated) since 1949 in a period when relative security prevailed. Most of the emigrants were European Jews, whereas most of the new immigrants were Arab Jews who found it very difficult to stay in their countries after the creation and survival of the aggressor settler-state of Israel.

The process of the revolution will inevitably increase the tempo of emigration, especially of those beneficiaries of a racist state who will find it very difficult to adapt to an open pluralistic society. Parallel to that development will be the increasing modernization of the Arab countries and toler-



ation of all minorities including the Jewish citizens. Fateh is already engaged in serious negotiations with several Arab countries to allow Jewish emigrants to return, to give them back their property, and to guarantee them full and equal rights.

These factors are expected, on the whole, to maintain relative population balance in Palestine.

The pace of social and educational development is increasing rapidly among the Arab Palestinians as well. It is estimated that the number of university graduates among the Palestinians in exile exceeds fifty thousand.

Palestinians have successfully played the role of educators, professionals and technicians in several Arab countries, especially those in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. Arab Palestinians faced this cultural challenge in pre-1948 Palestine and managed in the relatively short period of thirty years to compete effectively with the Jews in agriculture, industry, education and even in the field of finance and banking. Armed with this spirit of a victorious revolution, hopefully in comradeship with a significant number of Jews, the Arabs of Palestine will become effective and equal partners in the building of the new country.

Integration of Palestine within the Arab region will add to its economic and political viability. The present Arab boycott will obviously be replaced by economic aid and trade, a goal which the settler-state of Israel completely failed to achieve, remaining thus an American ward and protégé during its entire existence.

Conclusion

The democratic, non-sectarian Palestine still lacks full clarity and elaboration, but this is the best that can be done at this stage of the arduous liberation struggle. Through armed struggle the Palestinians have outgrown their bitterness

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and prejudice in a relatively short time. A few years ago, discussing this proposal would have been considered as a complete sell-out or high treason. Even today, some Arabs find it difficult to accept the proposed goal and secretly—or publicly—hope that it is nothing more than a tactical propaganda move.

Well, it is definitely not so. The Palestinian revolution is determined to fight for the creation of the new democratic and nonsectarian Palestine as the long-term, ultimate goal of liberation. Annihilation of the Jews or of the Palestinian exiles and the creation of an exclusive racist or theocratic state in Palestine, be it Jewish, Christian or Moslem, is totally unacceptable, unworkable, and cannot last. The oppressed Palestinian masses will fight and make all needed sacrifices to demolish the oppressive, exclusive state.

The Israeli racists are greatly irritated by the idea of a democratic Palestine. It reveals the contradictions of Zionism and bares the moral schizophrenia that besets world Jewry since the creation of Israel. The Israeli Jewish professor Eli Lobel and the French Jewish writer Ania Francos were threatened and molested by Zionists for their sponsorship of a democratic Palestine as the ultimate goal of liberation. The Zionists are stepping up their campaign to discredit the idea, especially among the Jews.

Their effort has been in vain. The forces of logic and the effect of years of persecution in exclusive societies at the hands of racists are opening the eyes of Jews and others in the world to the only permanent solution that will bring a lasting peace and justice to our Palestine: building a progressive, open, tolerant country for us all.